

Scotpress

ENTERPRISE :



LOG

ENTRIES

65

**a STAR TREK
fanzine**

CONTENTS

NORTHERN LIGHTS	by Janice Pitkethley	P 3
RETURN TO TODAY	by Karen Hayden	P 10
DAUGHTER FROM THE PAST	by Doris Scultze	P 11
WE BELONG TO TOMORROW	by Linda Wood	P 38
CHANGE OF OUTLOOK	by Vicki Richards	P 39
I AM THE CAPTAIN OF THE ENTERPRISE	by Linda Wood	P 46
BEAUTIFUL DREAMER	by Karen Hayden	P 47
THIS SPECIAL PLACE	by Karen Hayden	P 50
THE SILENT TIME	by Linda Wood	P 52
GLADIATOR, LOVE NO GLADIATOR	by Sheryl Peterson	P 64
AFTERWARDS	by Brenda Kelsey	P 68
THE LECTURE	by L Hester, C Hume, G Phillips	P 70
MOBIUS TIME	by David Gomm	P 74
DREAM OF IDIC	by Karen Hayden	P 96
ICE CASTLES	by Sheryl Peterson	P 97
SPOCK	by Sheryl Peterson	P 99
THE SHIELDED HEART	by Sheryl Peterson	P 100

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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to E-Log Entries 65. We've decided to make this a double-length issue and not put one out in December this year. Money is always tight so near to Christmas, and we don't like sending zines out too near to the Christmas rush - which means that we're often holding orders for two to three weeks before we can send them out. We thought that you'd prefer to get the two zines before your annual spending spree.

We'd like to welcome a new writer to this issue - Doris Schultze. We're sure you'll join us in hoping that she sends us something else soon. Incidentally, the change in spelling of the name of the girl in Doris's story part way through is deliberate, to indicate the difference between the way Siggi pronounced her name and the way the Enterprise crew did.

All of us at ScoTpress wish all of you the compliments of the season, and best wishes for 1985.

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Am 79

NORTHERN LIGHTS

by

JANICE PITKETHLEY

"What a night!" Kirk exclaimed as the shuttlecraft rocked once more on the descent to Earth. "You would think we were due a better welcome than this after being away for so long."

Indeed, Mother Earth was throwing all the fury she could at them, jagged flames of lightning lit up the windows and the shuttlecraft bucked in the tolling thunder and torrential rain.

Everyone was thrown to the floor as a bolt of lightning hit the Galileo; it was almost turned over, smoke pouring from the controls and other equipment. The occupants caught a glimpse of Earth whirling away from them as the shuttlecraft tossed in the storm-laden atmosphere.

Spock as usual was the first to recover. Steadying himself he wrestled with the controls as smoke rose around him.

"We are out of control, Captain." He had to shout to make himself heard above the storm.

"Hold on..." Kirk yelled as they plunged towards Earth, heading for the Northern hemisphere.

The land flashed past in a blur as the craft flew on, out of control.

"Crash landing in one minute thirty seconds." Spock's voice could be heard above the noise. Everyone braced themselves.

The shuttlecraft hit the ground, rolling over and over until it finally came to rest against a bank of snow.

"Anyone hurt?" McCoy was on his feet and climbing over the broken chairs and other pieces of debris to reach Kirk, who was holding his arm in an awkward position.

"It's nothing, Bones - I wrenched my shoulder when we came down."

Sulu was unhurt and the young lieutenant who was to have acted as Kirk's secretary during the conference was only badly frightened. Spock wiped at a small cut on his forehead.

"Let me see that..." McCoy advanced on him.

"I collided with this chair, Doctor." Spock turned his attention to the mangled controls, leaving McCoy standing there.

"Looks like the frozen north out there." Kirk shivered. "Any idea where we are, Spock?"

"The 'frozen north', as you have said, is probably correct, Captain. We are in the northern hemisphere during the winter season."

"How bad is the damage?" Kirk winced as he tried to move his shoulder.

"Bad enough." Spock straightened up, wiping his brow. "The enforced landing caused the computer circuits and the auxiliary controls to malfunction - "

"I think he means it's bust." McCoy's voice was sarcastic.

"Leave it, you two. We have enough problems as it is." Kirk stopped the cynical doctor from going any further. He stepped out of the shuttlecraft and into a deep snowdrift which came higher than waist level. Spock raised one eyebrow as the swearing Kirk tried to extricate himself from the clinging snow.

"The snow saved us from being smashed to pieces, Captain," Spock said quietly.

Red-faced, Kirk climbed out of the snowdrift.

Where were they? All that could be seen for miles was snow, stretching into the far distance with no sign of civilisation. Kirk opened his communicator, but all he got was the crackle of static, probably due to the electrical storm. The Enterprise was out of contact.

"It's no use." He closed it again. They went back inside the shuttlecraft as the temperature was well below freezing, the icy wind driving stinging particles of ice into their faces.

"Looks as if we're stranded. The shuttlecraft is damaged beyond repair." Kirk waved his arms about, trying to restore the circulation.

"I have a suggestion, Captain."

Everyone turned to look at the Vulcan.

"The shuttlecraft's life support will not sustain five of us for very long in these temperatures," he continued. "It is damaged, and several parts are already frozen. I suggest we make an attempt to reach civilisation and bring help. I am capable of making the journey and - "

"You?" McCoy cut him short. "You couldn't stand the temperatures out there as well as we could - the cold out there is around minus fifty degrees! A Vulcan is the last person I would send out on a mission like that!"

"I agree, Spock. You would never make it," Kirk joined in. "Dr. McCoy and I will try to reach help. You will remain here with Mr. Sulu and Lt. Wells."

But Spock had already opened the Galileo's equipment locker and was pulling on protective clothing. Kirk and McCoy looked at each other.

"Okay, Spock, you can go with us," Kirk sighed.

They left Sulu and the young lieutenant in the shuttlecraft and set out on the journey. The going was hard and slow, as the snow was very deep and soft. It clung to their legs as they tried to walk, giving the sensation of trying to wade through water. Spock's face was almost hidden in the jacket's thermo-hood; Kirk and McCoy were similarly clad. They struggled on and on on the snowy whiteness. It was almost too cold to speak; the air had to be breathed through a gloved hand held over the nose and mouth.

The sullen grey sky darkened as the winter night approached. Kirk decided to call a halt.

Spock and McCoy built a rough shelter made of snow while Kirk managed to get a fire going. In no time at all they were sitting by its warmth, gratefully drinking hot coffee from the stores they had carried with them.

For the twentieth time that day (or so it seemed) McCoy asked Spock if he was all right. Somewhat irritated by the doctor's fussing, Spock replied in the affirmative.

"Keep moving your feet," McCoy advised, "and don't take your gloves off, even for a second."

"Yes, Doctor." One eyebrow climbed upwards beneath the thermo-hood.

"We will rest for while and then move on. It would be fatal to sleep." Kirk moved closer to Spock. McCoy did the same on the other side and the three of them huddled together for warmth.

"What the - ?" came McCoy's startled exclamation as a band of light crossed the sky. It hung there, shimmering and dancing in all different colours. Streaks of light rushed over their heads towards the far horizon then came rushing back to form a dancing curtain.

What is it?" Kirk gazed upwards, spellbound.

"I believe it is called the 'aurora borealis'," Spock replied. "It is the magnetic lights from the place you call the 'north pole'."

"The Northern Lights... Then we could be in the Arctic Circle or something."

They moved on as the numbing cold began to creep through the layers of clothing. The dancing bands of light overhead made it as clear as day and the snow sparkled like diamonds.

So beautiful... and yet so dangerous, McCoy thought, looking at the hostile landscape around them.

The long winter night dragged on and on. Still the temperature fell. Kirk could feel his face and nose freezing up and every breath was agony. The edges of their thermo-hoods were rimmed with ice. Spock was feeling the effects of the cold worse than the other two; several times he stumbled and almost dropped into the drifting snow.

"What's wrong, Spock?" Kirk managed to steady him.

"I cannot feel my legs, Captain," came the answer.

"Let me see one of your hands." McCoy was at their side at once. "Just take a glove off for a second or two... "

McCoy did not like what he saw. The Vulcan's fingers had a bluish tinge to them as did his ears and face when McCoy looked into the thermo-hood. He made a sign to Kirk, and hurried them on even faster.

Another few miles further on, Kirk and McCoy had to support Spock between them; he could hardly walk by now and leaned heavily on them as he tried to force his legs forward.

A strange noise made the Enterprise men stop and turn to see what it was and where it was coming from.

"Wow!" McCoy breathed as a magnificent stag came into view, proudly leading his herd across the snowy wastes.

"Reindeer!" Kirk exclaimed. "First the aurora, and now a herd of reindeer. We must be in Greenland or somewhere like that."

The going got harder as they began climbing upwards, the ground rising now.

"Bones - do you see what I see?" Kirk pointed as they reached the top of the hill. Towering above them was a high mountain range, stark and forbidding, the pine trees showing through the snow on the lower slopes. What Kirk was so excited about was a small cottage nestling in the valley.

"At last!" McCoy eagerly followed his gaze.

They were taking turns to carry Spock now, and struggled down towards the valley and the cottage. Civilisation...

Their arrival was noticed. The cottage door opened and a fur-clad figure emerged, gesturing for them to enter. It seemed like a roaring furnace in there after the bitter wind outside.

The muffled figure looked at them for a moment and launched into a strange language which no-one could understand.

"Is that Russian?" Kirk whispered to McCoy.

The figure pushed back the fur hood. It was a woman.

"Ah, ye dinna speak the Gaelic?" she said in a lilting accent which seemed familiar somehow.

"Where - " Kirk began before the woman motioned for him to be silent.

"Put your friend down there," she said in her soft voice, indicating a low bed in one corner of the room. McCoy laid the Vulcan down on it without removing his thermo-jacket or hood. The woman covered him with an enormous down-filled quilt, the thickness of which Kirk and McCoy had never seen before.

"Aye, he's suffering from exposure." She tucked the quilt around the still form. "Have ye walked far?"

"We had an accident," Kirk explained, warming himself at the roaring fire. "We crashed in our... craft... many miles from here. Would you mind telling me where we are?"

"Ye're at the foot of the Lairig-Ghru, laddie."

Laddie?

That word sounded familiar... and her accent... It was more lilting than Scotty's, but similar... Surely they couldn't be in -

"Are we in Scotland?" Kirk was almost afraid to ask.

"That ye are."

"...but... We can't be - we saw the aurora borealis and a herd of reindeer... plus it's almost minus fifty out there... "

"What did ye expect? You can see the aurora from Dundee northwards,

and the reindeer were introduced some time in the twentieth century. The conditions here were the same as in their native land. As for it being so cold out there, do you realise that we are almost as far north as Siberia?" The woman told them all this as she bustled around, filling mugs with something that smelled very nice. Both Kirk and McCoy looked at the clear liquid it contained with something very close to suspicion.

"Never mind looking, get it down you," she urged. "It is an old Highland recipe for cold."

Kirk clawed at his throat, gasping for air as the first sip went down, burning a fiery trail all the way. "Wow," he wheezed, trying to get his breath back. "What's in that?"

"It's lethal!" McCoy wiped the tears from his eyes. "It's strong enough to melt an iceberg! What did you put in it?"

"Ah, that would be telling now." The woman wagged her finger at him. "An old family recipe. The main ingredient is whisky."

She urged Kirk and McCoy to finish the strange potion. By the time they did, a glorious feeling of warmth had sped through their bodies. Kirk even removed his thermo-jacket.

"Thank you," he said to the woman. "I feel a lot better now. We have not yet introduced ourselves. I'm James T. Kirk and this is Dr. Leonard McCoy."

"And I am Morag McGregor. What is your friend's name?" She gestured at the bed where Spock lay unmoving.

"He is Spock," Kirk answered.

Seeing Morag's look of surprise, he began to explain about the Enterprise and how they had crashed in the shuttlecraft. "Spock is a Vulcan," he finished.

Morag looked at McCoy who was kneeling beside the bed, scanner in hand. He turned it off, satisfied. He felt the Vulcan's face and hands; they were much warmer now and colour was coming back into his face.

"He's thawing out." McCoy looked at the roaring fire, its heat spreading outwards in all directions.

"A Vulcan..." Morag's voice sounded excited. "I've seen pictures of them, but that's all... And tae think there's one right here in my wee hoosie!"

Some of the things she said they found hard to understand, her accent even stronger than Scott's. They watched in amusement as she tried to see Spock's features, most of which were hidden by the thermo-hood.

"What kind of communication do you have?" Kirk interrupted. "May we use it?"

"Aye, come awa' ben." She led the way through to another room, leaving her interested study of Spock. There stood the most sophisticated form of communication Kirk had seen anywhere except Starfleet.

"It is my only form of contact, living in this isolated place," Morag explained.

"I understand."

Kirk managed to contact Starfleet and gave them their position and the location of the shuttlecraft. "Our communicators were useless, all we got was static," he finished.

"Under the conditions that was not surprising. The interference from the electrical storm plus the magnetic field from the aurora blocked your signal," the Admiral informed them. "I will have a rescue team out to pick up you and your crewmen. We will be with you as soon as possible."

When they got back to the other room, they found that Spock had moved slightly. McCoy went over to check. The Vulcan's body heat was returning along with his colour.

"He should be wakening any time now. Can you make some more of that brew of yours?" he asked Morag.

"Aye." She set about the task.

"Bones! You can't give that stuff to a Vulcan - " Kirk protested.

"Why not? If that doesn't get that green ice-water of his going again, nothing will!" McCoy grinned.

Morag followed McCoy over to the bed and stood there holding the mug of liquid. McCoy slid an arm round Spock's shoulders and raised him a little, drawing off the thermo-hood. There was a gasp from Morag as she looked at his features.

Spock's eyes flickered and opened. He looked around at the unfamiliar surroundings and then at McCoy and Morag.

"The logical question would be to ask, 'Where am I?'"

"Never mind just now. Here, drink this." McCoy held the mug to his lips.

Spock choked on the fiery liquid, pushing the mug away. "I presume that is one of your witch-doctor potions?"

"If you must know, it's an old Scottish recipe our hostess made, genuine firewater, guaranteed to make your hair curl... "

"Please. Doctor. Do not force me to drink it. I could not."

"Yeah, I know. I would be responsible for the sudden consequences," McCoy said as a thought passed through his mind. "We have enough problems as it is."

He took the mug from Spock and handed it back to Morag. "No offence, Ma'am, but it is not suitable for a Vulcan."

"Aye, no' everyone can take it." Morag disposed of the mug and its contents. "Come, sit here," she said kindly, drawing a chair closer to the fire as Spock got up. He stared into the dancing flames as the heat engulfed him. At last he felt warm again.

"It's great to have visitors. It's no' every day that three Starfleet officers come calling." She looked at Spock as she said this.

"Forgive me, Ma'am, but what made you come to live in this isolation?" McCoy asked.

"Och, I dinna like cities and I wouldna' live under a dome if ye paid

me! I like the natural atmosphere about me... Plus I have my work. I'm a writer and an artist."

"Those are good enough reasons," Kirk said, looking at a spectacular painting of the aurora.

"We have a Scot on board the Enterprise. He comes from Hawick in the Border country," McCoy informed her.

"Ah, a Lowlander. It's nice doon there, but I prefer the mountains."

She stopped speaking as the sound of approaching engines could be heard.

"Here comes our transport." Kirk looked out of the window as the aircar landed in a cloud of snow, then turned to Morag. "Goodbye, and - thank you for everything."

"Och, it was nothing, laddie. My door is always open... "

She watched as the three men climbed into the aircar and were gone.

Three days later, after the conference, they rejoined the Enterprise. Scott rose from the command chair as Kirk and Spock walked in, followed by McCoy.

"I - er - heard about yer wee detour," Scott declared with a sly smile.

"Detour? We should have been equipped for a Polar Expedition! And - you're always going on about Scotland. You forgot to mention the snow and the freezing temperatures, the reindeer and the aurora borealis, the isolation... We were sure we had landed on the Steppes of something... "

"Ah, weel, Cap'n, ye did visit the Highlands in winter... "

"Get out of here, you... you... tartan eskimo!" Kirk grinned.

Everyone but Spock understood the laughter which echoed around the bridge...



Return to Today

by

KAREN HAYDEN

Alone, here in my cabin,
Content in the knowledge that he sleeps safe next door,
I can relax, reflect, remember
Those events which almost took him from us.
I can allow my feelings of guilt, remorse, to surface
Because it was my order which had caused his 'death'.
And I can attempt to find a way to face the future, when other
Decisions of a like kind will have to be made again...

The unknown beckoned to us all,
And I used my charm, my persuasiveness
To make them all realise anew
Why we were out here amongst these stars.
But I would never have done it
If I had known the cost -
Not even for my Enterprise.

So much has occurred so quickly...
The death of Spock's body - almost...
What I had thought was the death of his soul, beyond salvation.
No miracles from Bones this time...
Only Sargon's intervention saved him... us...
From the evil of Henoah's plans.
But it had cost me the life
Of he who means so much to me.

Spock's death... or so I thought.
I agreed because of the four hundred lives aboard ship, and
countless others
Who would suffer if I did not.
But how could I have lived
Without that other half of me?
Even now I wonder how I survived
That moment of his collapse...

But Sargon gave me the greatest gift of all.
He would not allow my sacrifice -
Even he could see what Spock meant to me!
He allowed Spock's life, in exchange for Henoah's;
And he did live, does live,
And my life is whole once more, too.
My life again means something to me,
For he stands at my side, and all is right.



DAUGHTER from the PAST

by

Doris Schulze

The Enterprise had used the slingshot effect to travel back in time once more. They were investigating some unsolved riddles in Earth's history of the 1940s. It was a routine mission given to the Enterprise upon the request of some historian. Their task was almost completed; it had been recording with the ship's sensors for the most part. Captain Kirk rose from the command chair.

"Mr. Spock, we're sending down a landing party to those village ruins the sensors reported. We might be able to get some closer readings on the type of weaponry used down there. We'll meet in the transporter room in fifteen minutes. Have Dr. McCoy, Mr. Kano and two men from security join us." As Spock joined him at the turbolift doors, Kirk added, "Mr. Sulu, you have the con."

The area where the landing party beamed down proved desolate and lifeless. They spread out, surveying the territory and taking tricorder readings. Suddenly, McCoy looked up from his tricorder in surprise. "Jim!" he called to Kirk who was next to him. "I'm getting some life readings from over there!" Pointing towards one of the ruins, he hurried off in the indicated direction, and Kirk followed him.

Following the tricorder reading, they went down to the basement of the house. The place was dark, and they had only the small lights on the tricorders to illuminate the room. After they scanned the room without finding anything, Kirk shrugged. "Must have been a tricorder malfunction, Bones. Come on, let's get out of here."

"Just one minute, Jim," McCoy replied. Then he took a sharp breath. "Over here, Jim! In this corner. Hurry!"

When Kirk joined him, he was already working feverishly, trying to remove debris and planks from a half-buried body. "Jim, go and get some help. We have to get her out of here fast." Kirk glanced at the motionless form. "Get moving!" McCoy shouted at him.

Ten minutes later they had uncovered the girl. McCoy bent to examine her. "Oh, my God!" he gasped suddenly as he discovered the bundle which had been partially shielded by her body. "There's a baby! I can't do anything for them down here. Jim, we have to get them up to the ship, fast!"

"Doctor, I don't think that would be wise," Spock said. "By doing so, we might risk changing history, therefore it would be illogical to - "

"Spare me your logic, Spock!" McCoy snapped. "I don't care about that right now. Dammit, there's a life at stake!" Kirk had his communicator open already. "Jim, have an emergency medical team standing by in the transporter room."

Several hours later, Kirk had scheduled a meeting with Spock and McCoy in the Enterprise's briefing room. It turned out that McCoy was late, and Kirk decided to inform himself about the situation.

"Well, Spock?" he asked, turning to his First Officer.

"The girl we beamed aboard carried an ID card, Captain. Her name is Seigrid Neumann. She was born in 1919 in - "

At that moment, McCoy entered the room. "Sorry, Jim. I was still busy - "

"It's all right, Bones. How's the girl?"

"She's going to be all right, but the baby is dead. Now can anybody tell me what this fussing is all about? I've saved a life. So what? I'm a doctor, for God's sake!"

Spock answered. "Doctor, it appears that in saving her life you have not helped her."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Seigrid Neumann was the daughter of a scientist. She died after a bomb attack in the fall of 1943. In saving her, you may have changed history, Doctor."

"What do you want to do, Spock? Kill her?"

"No, but it is apparent that we cannot return her either."

"Why not? I don't know any famous person of that time named Neumann."

"That is not the point, Doctor. Seigrid Neumann was studying to work on the same project as her father did. Her father died only a couple of months after his daughter. We don't know what would happen if his daughter were able to continue his work."

"Spock's right, Bones," Kirk said quietly. "The risk is too great. You know how a minor incident can change all history. The girl has to stay here. Do you think she can deal with it, Bones?"

"I've no idea. She's still unconscious; and anyway, I wouldn't dare tell her what's happened right away."

"O.K., Bones. I'm relying on your medical judgement. Gentlemen, this meeting is closed."

McCoy returned to sickbay to check on his patient's progress. He was bending over her when the girl started to come round. She opened her eyes and saw concerned blue eyes looking down at her.

She tried to rise. "Wo... wo bin ich?"

McCoy tried to push her back against the pillow. "Easy. You're all right."

"English. Who are you?"

"I'm Dr. Leonard McCoy. And you are Zae... Sig... That's an unusual

name. I'm not sure how to pronounce it."

"Call me Siggi. How do you know my name?"

"You had an ID card with you when we found you."

"Where am I? Is this a hospital?"

"Yes, sort of. How do you feel?"

"Tired. Where is my child?"

McCoy lowered his eyes and was silent for a moment. "Dead. I'm sorry. She died shortly after we found you. I wasn't able to do anything."

Siggi tried to get up, but McCoy put a restraining hand on her shoulder. She began to cry and to tremble uncontrollably.

McCoy reached for a hypo, and selecting a tranquilliser on the dial, he pressed it to her arm. Then he took her in his arms and started talking to her softly. "Easy, easy. Relax... Ahh. Ahh."

The sobbing ebbed away slowly as the drug took effect, and finally she fell asleep against his shoulder. McCoy eased her back on the pillows, looking down on her thoughtfully.

McCoy had returned to his office and was working on a report to the Surgeon General. The buzzer sounded, and a tired-looking Kirk entered the room.

"Bones, I've got a headache. And how is your patient?"

McCoy didn't answer, but got up and gave Kirk some pills. "Here, take these. They ought to take care of your headache."

Kirk swallowed the pills and noticed the open brandy bottle on the doctor's desk. "Bones, you haven't answered my question yet. How is the girl? Any complications?"

"No complications, no." McCoy shook his head and poured a shot of brandy for each of them. "She's going to be all right physically, but the shock must be enormous."

"Have you told her yet?"

"No. She just knows about the baby, and that was a terrific shock to her. I have her under sedation now. Jim, I don't know how to explain this to her. That girl is already frightened enough. What must she have been through! She was suffering from malnutrition, and she's had that infection on her arm for quite some time. They didn't have any decent antibiotics in those days... and who knows how long she was lying there?" McCoy stopped and looked at Kirk.

"Don't worry, Bones. There is no need to rush anything. When you think she's able to deal with it, we'll take her round the ship, and tell her slowly. I think even Spock will help."



McCoy was working at his desk when his 'problem child' woke again. She was calmer now, took in her surroundings, and watched the man at the desk.

McCoy looked up when he felt her eyes upon him. He smiled at her.

"Hello, Siggi. Have you slept well?"

She didn't quite trust her voice. "Hmmm... yes. I... I thought I was dreaming. How did I get here?"

"That's a long story. We'll talk about it later. Right now, how about some breakfast? Aren't you hungry?"

Hungry? Yes. Only now did she notice it. "Yes. I... I... "

"All right. I'll be right back."

He returned carrying a tray loaded with food. Placing it on her nightstand, he pulled up a chair. "Help yourself."

She just stared at the tray. There was porridge, with sugar and cream if she wanted them, ham and eggs, fried chicken, toast and two mugs of steaming hot tea. "You... you must be American."

He took one of the bowls of porridge and started eating. Nodding, he said, "Yeah, I'm from Georgia."

She too started eating. "My Dad said that you are not as they tell us. He was in the States before the war, and he said he liked it. I never thought I would meet some of your people."

McCoy noted with satisfaction that her fear had given way to curiosity. She had finished the porridge and started on the chicken with growing appetite. After twenty minutes, the tray was empty. Siggi burped. Embarrassed, she said, "I'm sorry."

McCoy grinned. "Doesn't matter. You seemed to enjoy your breakfast."

"Oh, yes. I'm full. That chicken was delicious; I've never eaten one done that way before."

"I had the recipe added to the food programming list. It's home-made from Georgia."

She looked at him, startled, but he didn't pay any attention to it. Removing the tray, he said, "Let's see how your arm is. You might even be able to get up for a few hours tonight."

She looked at her bandaged arm. "I didn't notice it till now! My arm doesn't hurt any more. What did you do?"

McCoy started to remove the dressing carefully and smiled. "Nothing unusual. I cleaned it up and gave you a shot, that's all. It's healing all by itself now." He ran the mediscanner over her arm. "In fact, it's healing beautifully; I don't think any scars will remain."

Puzzled, she said, "But I've had this for almost two months. I went to see a doctor, but he couldn't do anything. In fact, he said he might... might... " Her face grew pale. "Might have to amputate it."

McCoy touched her shoulder gently. "There have been a lot of advances in the medical field. You're going to be all right."

"But then why did my baby...?"

"She was just barely alive when we found you. She was too weak and I... " His voice trailed off.

She looked at him. Were there clouds in those blue eyes now? His head was bowed. After a moment he continued speaking. "Our knowledge may have grown enormously, but lots of things are still beyond our reach. I'm sorry, Siggi."

With tears in her eyes, she said, "It isn't your fault, Doctor."

He had finished redressing her arm and turned to leave.

"No - please don't go." There was such urgency in her voice that he stopped and turned back to her.

"Easy. What is it?"

"I... I want to learn... what I can. I might be able to help."

"You're free to learn everything you want."

"You mean... I'm not a prisoner of war? How... "

"No, of course not. There's no need to be afraid. I'll explain it to you later, I promise. Just now, you ought to get some rest."

Tears were running down her cheeks freely now. Embarrassed, she tried to wipe them away. McCoy squeezed her shoulder, and pushed her softly back against the pillows. "There's no need to be ashamed. Crying often helps a lot. That baby meant a lot to you; I know how you feel. I have to go now. Try to relax." He went to the door.

"Doc - "

He smiled reassuringly. "I'll be back soon."

When McCoy reached his office, he sat down heavily. He switched on the intercom. "McCoy to bridge."

"Kirk here. Bones, what is it?"

"Jim - can you spare a few minutes?"

"Sure, I'll come down as soon as - "

"I'd rather see you somewhere else," McCoy interrupted. "Siggi is awake now, and I don't know ... "

Noting the tension in the doctor's voice, Kirk nodded. "O.K., meet me in my quarters in fifteen minutes."

"All right, Bones, what's the trouble?" Kirk asked.

"Jim, Siggi thinks she is a prisoner here. I told her she's not, but I guess we'll have to give her a full explanation soon. Certainly she's

intelligent enough, only I don't know how... "

"Bones, do you think that's the right thing to do? You told me she was frightened."

"Yes, that's true. But I've talked to her since. She learns quickly, and she has a fair knowledge of our language. The thing which seems to bother her most is that she doesn't know exactly what kind of situation she is in. Jim, I'm going to allow her to get up tonight, and I'm going to explain to her. I want you to be present also. I might need your help."

Kirk nodded. "If you think that's best then we'll do it. If you want me to, I'll ask Spock to come along too. His knowledge might be helpful."

"I'm not going to debate Spock's knowledge, but in this case... " McCoy smiled. "This is already going to be quite hard for Siggi to deal with, and I don't want her scared by little green men."

"Oh. I didn't think of that. Where do you want me to come tonight, though?"

"I think sickbay should be all right; at least that's somewhere familiar to her. And, Jim - "

"What else is on your mind, Bones?"

"Jim, Siggi wants to learn. There are so many new things, and she's showing interest already."

"I'll ask Spock to work out a schedule for her until we can get her to a rehab station, and - "

"No!" McCoy interrupted. "Jim, we can't do that! Dammit, she's not a criminal!" He broke off and shook his head. "I'm sorry, Jim."

"Bones, she's got to adapt to our century."

"But can't we keep her aboard? She has some scientific training. She'll be able to fit in."

Kirk looked at the Chief Medical Officer for a long moment. McCoy didn't get that involved very easily. There had to be a reason. Then Kirk asked, "Why, Bones?"

"Jim, in a way I'm responsible for her situation - "

"Bones, you - " Kirk interrupted.

"No, Jim, let me finish. I'm not regretting that I helped her. Gosh, no. I'm a doctor and that's what I'm supposed to do. It's just... I like this kid, and I want to keep an eye on her."

Kirk studied the doctor's face. He had known McCoy for quite a long time, and over the years he had also learned about some of his background. He knew of McCoy's divorce and about his daughter. That daughter must be about Siggi's age. Kirk nodded.

"All right. We'll give it a try. We're a bit short of personnel, anyway. You'd probably like to have her in your department."

McCoy was silent for a moment. Then he said quietly, "Thank you, Jim."

McCoy returned to sickbay and found Nurse Chapel waiting for him with a pile of reports. He checked on the patients' progress. All were recovering quite well, only one showed a slight set-back, and McCoy made a mental note to check on that person later. Then he turned back to Chapel. "How is Siggi?"

"She was sleeping when I looked in about half an hour ago."

McCoy nodded. "She probably still needs a lot of rest. Well, I'll go to her now, anyway."

"Don't you think you're fussing a bit too much about her, Doctor?" Chapel asked, smiling.

"No - I just don't want her to feel hospitalised and - " He broke off, grinning. "Well, I guess I just like her. Christine, would you mind looking after her a bit while I'm seeing to my other patients? I'm going to let her use that room next to my office until she's assigned her regular quarters."

Chapel glanced at the doctor curiously, but then decided to ask no questions. Instead, she smiled. "Sure."

McCoy turned to leave, but paused at the door. "And get some clothes for her, will you?"

He found Siggi awake, staring at the ceiling. She didn't notice his entrance and was a bit startled when he spoke. "Bored, Siggi?"

"What? Oh - yes, I guess so."

Glancing at the body function panel, McCoy said, "Everything looks just fine. I'll give you another shot to make sure it stays this way, and then you can get up."

McCoy took out a hypo, and Siggi looked at the instrument with interest. "What is that?"

"A hypo." Then he realised that that didn't answer her question. Selecting the appropriate medication on the dial, he pressed the hypo to Siggi's arm. "It's used to inject people. It carries the drug directly into the bloodstream by using pressurised air instead of a needle."

She winced at the hiss of the hypo. "It still hurts."

McCoy shrugged. "Some things never change. It isn't supposed to, though. You shouldn't feel much when your arm is relaxed."

Nurse Chapel entered the room, carrying a clip board. "Doctor, Ensign Harper's internal bleeding's started again."

McCoy looked up in alarm. "Have him prepared for surgery immediately." Chapel nodded acknowledgement and left. McCoy turned back to Siggi. "I'm sorry, Siggi. Nurse Chapel will help you get settled. When I'm through with that operation, I'll show you round a bit, O.K.?"

Siggi nodded. Then she asked, "Doctor, can I get something to read?"

"Of course. I'll show you how to operate the - " He broke off, realising that it was probably too early to give her access to the library computer. "I'll get you some books. I mostly have medical stuff, but Jim has a nice collection. I'll ask him. See you later."

When McCoy returned from the operating theatre two hours later, Siggi was sitting on the couch in the room next to McCoy's office, listening to some music. She was wearing a uniform now.

McCoy dropped into a chair. Smiling at Siggi, he said, "That fits you nicely."

"Thank you, Doctor. - You look very tired. How is that patient?"

"It was tough, but he's going to make it. We'll have some coffee, and then I want you to meet the Captain."

"The Captain?" There was a slight note of fear in Siggi's voice again.

McCoy noticed it, and said, "No need to get worried. Jim Kirk is nobody to be scared of. He's my best friend."

The doctor rose and led the way to his office. He ordered the coffee and pointed to a chair. "Make yourself comfortable."

He brought the coffee and settled down in a chair too. At that moment, the buzzer sounded. "Come," McCoy said.

As Kirk entered the room, Siggi rose with a start. McCoy placed a hand on her arm. "It's all right. You're off duty already, Jim?"

Kirk nodded. Then he extended his hand towards Siggi. "I'm Captain James T. Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise."

Siggi ignored the offered hand and took a step backwards. An awkward silence followed, then McCoy said, "Would you like to join us for some coffee, Jim? Have a seat."

As Kirk dropped into a chair, Siggi reseated herself. Kirk took his cup, ran a hand through his hair and closed his eyes for a moment. McCoy studied the Captain's face. There were shadows under Kirk's eyes.

"Headache again, Jim?"

Kirk nodded. "Yes."

"You should get some rest. You've been pushing yourself too hard lately."

"No lecture, Bones. Just give me some pills."

It was Siggi who answered. "Pills are no substitute for sleep."

Both Kirk and McCoy looked at her in surprise. "She's right, Jim," McCoy said, then he grinned at Siggi. "You'll make quite a doctor one day, young lady."

Kirk smiled too. "I guess Bones is right. My compliments, Miss Newman."

"I believe you didn't just come down here to pay me compliments, did you?"

Again both men were somewhat taken aback. *Where is the frightened girl of only a couple of hours ago?* McCoy wondered. Siggi seemed calm now, even rather reserved.

"Well, no. You're right," Kirk answered. "We have in fact quite a lot to tell you." He then started to tell Siggie about their mission, the accident, the danger of changing history, and the like; sometimes McCoy interrupted with some additional information or explanation.

"... The United Federation of Planets is an alliance of many different races and cultures," Kirk continued. "We're working for the common good of all our worlds, and try to preserve peace throughout the galaxy. In our century, most races live in peace with each other, and freedom and equality are the things of utmost importance. Through their contact with other races, humanity has gained immensely; as you have probably noticed, there has been enormous progress in medicine; also in science and engineering and many other fields." Kirk paused, looking at Siggie. She was sitting quietly, taking in all the information in silence. Kirk smiled at her. "I know this is all quite a lot at once, and it's probably quite hard for you to grasp at the moment. But don't worry. You'll get used to it."

"I'll do my best to learn, Captain, and - "

At that moment the buzzer sounded again, and McCoy reached automatically for the release button as he called "Come!" The door slid open and the Vulcan First Officer entered.

"Captain, Mr. Scott told me I could find you down here. I've discovered additional data - "

Siggie, who had been staring at Spock since he entered the room, suddenly screamed and rose with a start. McCoy managed to get a hold of her and pushed her back into the chair, "Easy! It's all right. Spock won't... "

But she was in panic and didn't listen to his words. Spock merely raised an eyebrow at her reaction.

Kirk rose and tried to reassure her. "Please, Ms. Newman. This is my First Officer, Mr. Spock... "

Siggie was now crying and trembling violently. Spock stood stiffly, unsure what to do. He felt Kirk's eyes upon him, and giving in to an urge of his Human half, he went over to the girl and placed a hand lightly on her arm. "Miss Neumann, it was not my intention to intimidate you. I should have considered that my appearance might disturb you. My apologies."

Siggie looked up at the strange tall man. She thought she saw a flicker of warmth in those dark eyes which hadn't been there before. She tried wiping away the tears and took a deep breath.

"It's... all right. I was just... surprised."

"Mr. Spock is from the planet Vulcan," Kirk said. "There is absolutely no reason to be afraid of him. He is the finest First Officer in the fleet, and he's my best friend. I trust him with my life."

"So do I," McCoy added. He paused. "But as far as the ears are concerned, I've been around him for quite some time, but I'm still not quite used to them."

Siggie managed to smile. "I see. Captain, as I was saying - I'll do my best to learn, but there seem to be so many incredible changes that I don't... "

"Ms. Newman, Bones mentioned that you showed an interest in medical

science. You also have some scientific training in that field already. Bones suggested that you might want to work in his department. So, if you are interested - "

"Interested, yes. But I don't know if I can handle all that technology, Captain."

"There is almost nothing men cannot learn to get used to," Spock said. "Learning is the very purpose of our being. We are learning from our first breath to our last." His calm eyes locked with hers. "We will all help you as much as we can, and I believe that you will be successful, but you also have to have confidence in yourself. You have lost your world and you must get used to a new one. We can assist you, but we cannot build it for you."

McCoy was gazing at the Vulcan. "Now, Spock, you aren't going to tell me... " But he fell silent again, realising that this was not the time for one of their 'exchanges'. Instead, he turned to Siggi. "I promise I'll give you all the help I can."

"That goes for me, too," Kirk said. "And I think I can speak for the rest of the crew as well." He paused. "So, if it is your wish, you can start your service life aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise as Ensign Newman of Life Sciences in a few days. We'll have to put in a formal request to Starfleet Command, of course, but I'm sure they'll agree. Now, do you want to tour the ship right away?"

"Honestly, I'd rather not. I'm quite tired."

"Well, then, get a good night's sleep," Kirk said. He rose. "I'm going back to the bridge. Coming, Spock?"

"Now wait a minute, Jim." McCoy rose too, and went to a wall cabinet. Taking out a bottle and glasses, he said, "You were complaining about a headache. As Siggi pointed out, pills cannot replace necessary rest. We all need that decent night's sleep, and I'll make that a medical order if necessary. But before that, I'm prescribing a nightcap for everybody." He started filling the glasses.

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Your 'nightcap', Doctor, does not appear to be any kind of headgear. I see no useful purpose in poisoning my system with alcohol. If you will excuse me." He rose and left the room.

McCoy stared after the Vulcan for a second, then he yelled, "Spock! Can you, for once... "

But the door had closed behind the Vulcan.

Weeks passed, and Siggi seemed to settle into the ship's routine quite well. Starfleet Command had approved Siggi's admission to the Enterprise crew, and she was now an official crew member. Everybody was surprised at the enormous progress she made; Siggi was learning fast and easily. She was working in the medical labs, and she was already able to conduct research on her own.

And yet a problem remained.

Siggi didn't socialise with the crew at all. In the beginning that had been considered a natural shyness, but she didn't make any response to anybody's attempts to make her feel at home on the Enterprise. As several

weeks passed, the crew finally thought her to be a natural loner, and the efforts at making friends with her ceased.

McCoy was worried about Siggi's behaviour. He had attempted talking to her on occasion, but he hadn't yet been able to break down the barrier she had erected around herself. He didn't want to force her to speak, and so he had decided that all he could do was wait.

It had been a long and hard day. There hadn't been any emergencies, but the steady flow of routine cases had been quite tiring. In the afternoon, McCoy had received a message tape from his daughter Joanna. She told him about her work in the hospital, and her mother's constant complaints about all kinds of different ailments. The message ended with "I'm feeling so lonely sometimes, Dad. When will you come on home leave?"

McCoy rose stiffly from his desk and filed away the last report he'd been working on. He pondered whether to answer Joanna's letter right away, but decided he was too tired for that. He'd settle for a hot bath and his bed now. Glancing at the wall chronometer, he realised that he was off duty already. Damn paperwork! It always took him so long.

In the ward he found Dr. M'Benga attending to a young crewman's hand. Looking over M'Benga's shoulder, McCoy said, "That's a nasty cut. How did you manage to do that, Lieutenant? Get into a fight?"

The lieutenant lowered his eyes and shifted uneasily. "No, sir. I... I broke my glass, sir."

Sensing that something was bothering the crewman, McCoy motioned to M'Benga. "I'll finish this off."

M'Benga looked at his senior officer. "But you're off duty, sir."

"That's all right. I'll finish this off - you can catch up on the patients' reports."

The younger doctor shrugged and exited. McCoy applied spray dressing to the hand. "All right. What happened?"

"Like I said, Doctor. I broke my glass and - "

"Now you aren't going to tell me you got that cut just from touching a broken piece, are you? As CMO, I'm responsible for the physical and mental well-being of the crew. I can order you to report if necessary."

The young man blushed, and McCoy added in a softer voice. "This is confidential, of course, but if there's somebody loose on the ship, causing fights or anything like that, I have to know."

"She's so beautiful."

"What? Who?" McCoy asked.

"Siggi Newman. She's so beautiful!" the crewman burst out. "I love her! I've tried to get to know her, but she doesn't respond. Tonight in the rec room, I kept looking at her... but she didn't even notice me. And... well, I must have crushed my glass."

There was a moment of silence, then McCoy said, "I see. Well, get some rest now. You're off duty for the next two days. Report down here tomorrow to get your hand checked."

The young lieutenant hesitated, and McCoy smiled inwardly. Probably

afraid he'd put him on report, disabling himself just because the girl he wanted didn't notice him. "Such accidents are always nasty, Lieutenant. Be more careful next time, all right?"

The lieutenant gave him a relieved smile. "Yes, sir, I will. Thank you, sir."

McCoy smiled after the departing crewman for a moment, then he too left sickbay. On the way to the turbolift he pondered this new problem. He couldn't blame Siggi for her behaviour, of course, but something needed to be done.

McCoy paused at the entrance to one of the rec rooms. A cup of coffee would go down nicely now. He entered the room, looking round. The room was almost empty - no wonder, at this hour. The light were already dimmed to give the illusion of night. In one alcove there was a couple embracing each other and murmuring softly. They hadn't noticed his entrance, and McCoy felt guilty for eavesdropping. He went quickly over to the food dispenser to get his coffee.

McCoy took the coffee and went to sit at one of the tables. Then he saw a lone figure at a table in one of the corners, bent over a reading screen.

Spock? No, the Vulcan would be on duty on the bridge now. Picking up his cup again, McCoy slowly approached the table with the single occupant. After a few steps he recognised the figure. Of course - it was Siggi; studying again. Was Spock pushing her too hard? No, that couldn't be it; the Vulcan had shown a patience and understanding with Siggi that McCoy hadn't thought him capable of.

He crossed right over to Siggi's table. "Reading again?" he asked. "Do you mind if I join you?"

He didn't get an answer, so he sat down without waiting for her response. Her head was turned so that he couldn't see her face. Then he noticed that she was trembling slightly. He reached out to touch her arm.

"What is it?" he asked softly.

Siggi raised her head to look at him for the first time, but she didn't speak. Her face was tear-stained. McCoy spoke again. "Siggi - I don't know what is bothering you, but don't you think it might help if you told me about it?"

"I want to go home and be with my own people!" Siggi burst out.

So *that* was it. She was homesick.

Siggi could not withhold the tears any longer. She was crying uncontrollably now. McCoy took the trembling girl in his arms and tried to hush her.

When she had calmed down somewhat, he said, "Come on - tell me about your people. But this isn't the place for it. Tell you what - we'll go to my quarters and you can tell me what's wrong, all right?" Siggi nodded.

In the doctor's quarters she looked around in wonder. She hadn't been there before. The cabin was only sparsely decorated, not luxuriously as she had expected from a senior officer; a couple of books, a few alien artifacts and paintings. The rest was standard equipment for officers' quarters.

McCoy went to his desk and returned with a bottle and two glasses. Filling them, he said, "Medical orders, Siggi. Cheers!"

Carefully, Siggi took a sip of the green liquid. It tasted like peppermint and caused a warm feeling in her stomach.

McCoy sat down at his desk and put his feet on the desk top. Indicating a chair, he said, "Take a seat." She did so and took another sip of her drink.

"Well?" McCoy asked, looking at Siggi expectantly. Then he realised that the formality of remaining behind his desk wasn't appropriate in this case. He rose and pulled up a chair next to the girl. "Siggi, I could tell you a long story about the psychological need of Human beings to share their problems with someone, but you know that as well as I do. And you don't seem to have formed a friendship with anyone in the crew." He paused, leaning back in his chair, and smiled. "So why not tell your good doctor about it?"

She began speaking in an almost inaudible voice at first, hesitatingly and haltingly, but then she spoke faster and faster as she released the story that had been confined too long within her.

She had been raised in a city, but after her mother was killed in a bomb attack, her father had insisted that she move to the country. There she had become acquainted with a young man. When she discovered she was pregnant, they decided to marry - but her fiance was a bomber pilot, and had been called back to his unit early. They had postponed their marriage until his next home leave, but he was lost in an attack over England.

McCoy suspected then that that was why she unconsciously shrank from forming any close acquaintances. He sat listening to her quietly for a long time; then when she finally fell silent, he said, "Well, right now we can't do anything about your homesickness. We're too far from Earth. But we're due for R & R pretty soon. You've had too much happening to you too quickly, haven't you? I guess the best thing for you is a shore leave." He rose. "It's late. We'd better get some sleep. But Siggi - if there's anything else bothering you, you can come to me at any time."

Siggi smiled. "Thank you, Doctor." She stopped at the door. "Good night."

McCoy smiled. "Good night. Sleep well, Siggi."

The scheduled shore leave was postponed because of an outbreak of a violent disease on one of the Federation's newly colonised worlds. The Enterprise had been ordered to deliver the necessary medical supplies to the planet, and to do some mapping and geological exploring of other planets in the sector.

This was all routine, and although things seemed to be going well, the prolonged routine was getting on the crew's nerves and influencing their behaviour. There had been a few incidents where people were hurt because of carelessness. Yes - the crew needed shore leave more than anything else.

McCoy sighed and leaned back in his chair. Paperwork again. To hell with the bureaucrats back at Starfleet Command! Every single treatment given to the crew and also to the people down on that planet had to be listed. Although he sometimes let M'Benga do the internal paperwork in

preparation for the day when his junior would be promoted, McCoy would only do the reports for Starfleet by himself. M'Benga had called him stubborn, but McCoy insisted that it was his duty as Chief Medical Officer.

He forced himself to concentrate on the report on the desk - the report of the Captain's last physical. Physically he was healthy, but all of his efficiency ratings were below normal. No wonder. McCoy's mind started to trail off again.

Abruptly, he shook his head. He wasn't getting anywhere. He was tired as hell. The reports would have to wait until the morning.

He rose and left his office. Out in the ward he met Nurse Chapel, who frowned at him. "You're working overtime again, Doctor."

He shrugged. "Those reports have to be finished."

"You should do what you ordered for the rest of the crew. Get some rest. You look as if you need it."

He answered with half a grin. "That's what I intend to do, right now." He headed for the nearest rec room, realising that he was starving.

When he entered the rec room, there was another surprise waiting for him. Siggie and the Vulcan First Officer were quietly engaged in a game of chess. McCoy smiled. That was a privilege usually reserved for the Captain only. Jim Kirk was the only one on board who could psych Spock out; otherwise the Vulcan only played against the ship's computer.

With Siggie, the computers had been special from the beginning. She was fascinated by them, once she had become used to them. In a way, she was not unlike Spock; her mind was seeking logic and perfection, and she too had erected a shield to hide her emotions behind.

McCoy sat down with his tray and began to eat, still watching the two figures engaged in their game. McCoy caught a trace of a smile on the Vulcan's face which vanished almost immediately.

Yes - there had been some improvement in Siggie's behaviour since their conversation a couple of weeks ago. Siggie still was no social butterfly - probably she'd never be one - but at least she now seemed to be developing a loose friendship with some of the female crewmembers, though she shrank back from any closer relationship with males. Even Jim's efforts in courting her had failed, and that really meant something. McCoy grinned. Even though Kirk had been disappointed, some kind of relationship had formed between the two. Kirk was no longer treating her in his Don Juan manner but in an almost brotherly way, and Siggie had learned to respond to the gentle teasing and sometimes brotherly advice of the Captain. They even called each other by their given names, off duty of course. McCoy was glad about that. At least Jim was somewhat closer to Siggie's age. Usually she hung around only with older members of the crew.

Her relationship with Spock was more formal, of course.

Spock lived up to his promise and helped Siggie a good deal in settling on the Enterprise. Some of the younger crewmen even called her 'Spock's Pet' behind her back.

However, McCoy was becoming growingly aware of the fact that Siggie's hanging around with the senior officers made it more difficult for her to get along with the rest of the crew. Yet there was nothing that could be done about it right now. Things had to work out on their own. He was grateful for the confidential relationship which was slowly forming between

himself and the girl. She had come to him with all kinds of problems once he had broken through her shell, and he had tried to help her with them as best he could.

Yes - she was a lot like Joanna. He wished he could see his own daughter more often... His train of thought was interrupted by a crash over at the chess table. Siggi's fist had come down on the table with a blow that knocked down some of the pieces.

"I warned you to pay more attention to the game, Miss Newman," Spock said, eyebrows on the rise. "You cannot expect to win a game of chess when your mind is occupied with something else. And I think this outburst of emotion was unnecessary."

She rose abruptly without giving an answer and left the room. McCoy got up too, leaving his unfinished meal on the table, and headed after her. Something was definitely wrong here. Usually, Siggi was calm, hardly revealing any of her emotions in public, sometimes making McCoy think that she was imitating the First Officer.

McCoy caught up with her before she reached the turbolift. "That was quite a scene back there. What's the matter?"

Siggi shifted uneasily, not meeting his eyes. "Nothing."

"Nothing? Do you want to make me believe - " He stopped, seeing that she was blushing. His voice softened. "Siggi, didn't we have an agreement that you'd come and see me if anything was bothering you?"

She lowered her eyes. "Please, Doctor - I don't want to talk about it."

"All right, I don't want to push you. But if you feel like talking, remember you can come any time."

The turbolift doors opened. She stepped inside, but turned immediately. "I will... Len."

"Siggi - wait!" McCoy's words were echoed from the sound of the closing turbolift doors.

McCoy frowned. Len? What did that mean? Then he shrugged it off. She must be as tired as he was. Probably a slip of the tongue.

Slowly he returned to the rec room to put away his tray. He didn't feel hungry any more. Tiredly, he ordered a drink from the food processor.

Crossing back to his table, he watched Spock resetting the chess pieces. He sat down as Kirk entered the room, heading for Spock's table. McCoy rose again and went over to join them.

"Care for a game of chess, Spock?" Kirk was asking.

"No, Captain, not tonight. I would rather get some rest. If you will excuse me, Captain."

Spock rose and left. Kirk turned to McCoy. "Bones? What's the matter with Spock? Is he all right?"

McCoy nodded. "Physically he's in the green, as usual." He hesitated for a moment before adding, "Siggi might have upset his Vulcan calm tonight. She suddenly tossed down the whole chess set. It was while I was eating - I've no idea what has got into her. She was losing against Spock,

and he said something about keeping her mind on the game when she had some kind of... almost a temper tantrum, except that she's basically too mature a person to throw tantrums. Well, I guess we all need a rest. But I want to know what's upsetting her, even though she doesn't want to talk about it. Jim - has she mentioned anything to you?"

"It's adding up," Kirk said absentmindedly.

"What?" McCoy asked in bewilderment.

Kirk placed a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Bones, we have that bottle of Saurian brandy to finish off. Let's go to my quarters and do it. We can talk there."

In Kirk's quarters, McCoy dropped into a chair. He started talking about Siggi; this time it was Kirk who listened quietly. After the third brandy, McCoy raised his hands in resignation.

"Jim, I don't know what's the matter with her. I thought she was learning to trust me, but now she's withdrawing behind a wall again and doesn't want to tell me what this is all about."

Kirk looked at his CMD for a moment in silence. Then he said, "Bones, I believe she has a crush on you."

Staring at Kirk, McCoy took a while to digest that bit of information. Then he burst out, "Poppycock! Then she has to be in love with Spock too. How for heaven's sake did you get that idea?"

"Well, how would you explain, for example, her reason for asking me whether you were married?"

Unusual as it was, McCoy didn't know what to answer. Kirk refilled their glasses. "Bones, I wouldn't worry about it too much. I think you've been closest to her, and it's only natural that some kind of relationship should form between the two of you."

McCoy nodded slowly. "I guess you're right, Jim. But that I didn't realise it... Damn, I'm supposed to be a trained psychologist! Sure, I like Siggi a lot, but I didn't give her any reason to think that I might be interested in an affair with her! Dammit, she's two years younger than my daughter!"

"Bones, as you pointed out, Siggi is still a kid in many ways. She's lost everyone who was dear to her. She has to cling to something, and I guess as the person she was around with most of the time, you're the one she chose." Kirk grinned. "You know, Bones, you do have some kind of father image."

McCoy remained silent for a while. Finally he grinned too. "We should trade professions, Jim. You'd make quite a psychiatrist sometimes. But I suppose I'll have to talk to Siggi about this sooner or later."

Kirk smiled. "It's part of my job. And Bones - don't push it with Siggi. Probably she'll pull herself together pretty soon."

Downing the last of his brandy, McCoy said, "Let's hope she does. Thanks for the brandy." He rose to leave. "Goodnight, Jim."



Three days later, the standard physicals for the crew were finished. Now he'd have to give the formal report to the Captain. McCoy sighed. Fortunately, there weren't any serious cases this time, but the whole crew, including himself and the Captain, were overtired. Kirk was fully aware of this, and McCoy hated that he had to remind him of it yet again. He knew the symptoms of Kirk's fatigue - he had treated his friend's headaches and sleepless nights often enough.

As if on cue, the sickbay doors opened and a weary-looking Captain entered. "So - what about the physicals, Bones?"

"There are no severe cases of illness, Captain, but all the efficiency ratings are down and there are signs of stress and fatigue. Hell, Jim, what the crew needs is some rest and fresh air. Why don't we just stop at the next habitable planet for shore leave? Even a couple of days?"

"Bones, you know my orders. We're to proceed with the mapping of this quadrant. I can't go against Starfleet Command and authorise shore leave - this area hasn't been properly surveyed yet. But I do have some good news; when we're through with this quadrant, we are to return to Earth for an overhaul of the ship and home leave for the crew. Until that time, there isn't much I can do, except maybe..." Kirk grinned. "We could arrange to send down a large survey party to the next Class M planet we come across. Does that fulfil your medical orders?"

McCoy grinned too. "Well, it'll help. Be sure that you get to do some exploring yourself, too."

As it turned out, they didn't have to wait too long for their 'extensive geological survey'. Captain Kirk was on the bridge when they came within scanning range of a Class M planet two days later. Spock made the announcement calmly. Kirk leaned back in his chair.

"Well, Mr. Spock, let's have the readings."

"The planet is Class M, oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, diameter 13126.37 kilometers, 0.876. Suitable for Human life. The sensors do not show any trace of intelligent life and there are no large mineral deposits." He raised his head from the viewer. "I recommend standard mapping procedure by sensor probe, Captain."

"No, Mr. Spock. Have the department heads meet in the briefing room in half an hour. We'll send down landing parties for a general survey."

Spock raised a questioning eyebrow at Kirk, but refrained from comment. "Yes, Captain."

Kirk turned to Uhura. "Ask Dr. McCoy to join me in my quarters in five minutes. Mr. Scott, you have the con. Mr. Spock - "

Spock looked sceptical even after he had been briefed on the plan, while the other senior officers shared the enthusiasm of Kirk and McCoy. "You are stretching the regulations, Captain," the Vulcan said quietly.

"Spock, you don't need me to explain to you the need Humans beings have to get some fresh air and rest. Why do you always have to be - " McCoy's voice had become quite loud.

"Bones, cut it. Dr. McCoy is right, though, Spock. And we *will* be conducting a survey, after all. Gentlemen, I want each of you to work out

a duty roster for your departments. We'll take five days for the survey. See that each person gets at least forty eight hours free time down on that planet. Ask Mr. Spock for further details. The first landing parties will beam down in three hours. This meeting is closed."

Two base camps from which the landing parties operated were established on the planet's surface.

The scenery was magnificent; luxuriant vegetation, lush meadows, lovely green hills, and also jagged rocks and steep mountains. The planet had the wild and undomesticated beauty of a world which had never been touched by Man's hand.

It had been a good idea to come down here, McCoy thought as he inhaled the fresh air deeply. It was a nice change, even though it wouldn't last long. Well, in a few weeks he would be back home for a longer leave.

Better get something done, he reminded himself. He had chosen to examine the flora. He had discovered some kinds of medicinal plants growing in abundance here which were rare on other worlds.

McCoy took a couple more tricorder readings of the spot he'd been examining before he got up and stretched his back.

He and the small group accompanying him had moved away from the main camp. McCoy had felt the need for some solitude and quietness. His small team was made up of himself, Siggi, a security guard, biologist Lt. Commander Jane Rowlands, and Spock. The Vulcan had joined them because they were at least doing *some* scientific work.

McCoy smiled to himself. The vast majority of the crew was hardly doing much in the field of science, the officers turning a blind eye to the lack of results from those groups who were supposed to be working. Jim was off with a small group stalking some bearlike creatures somewhere in the mountains. It would require some hard thinking for *him* to write his report...

Spock, Rowlands and the security guard were tracking an animal which, according to the tricorder readings, possessed semi-intelligence; and Siggi was nearby, gathering samples of wild berries.

McCoy looked around. Well, she *had* been there a few minutes previously, but now there was no sign of her.

"Siggi!" he called out.

When he didn't get an answer, he shrugged. She must have become bored. He wiped the sweat from his forehead. This planet was beautiful, but also damn hot. The sun had almost reached the zenith. Spock had called it 'pleasantly warm' but McCoy found the growing heat intolerable. Gathering up his instruments, he walked slowly back to the tent. On an impulse, he grabbed a towel. He'd go for a swim in the nearby creek.

When McCoy returned to the tent half an hour later, Siggi was still nowhere in sight. McCoy opened his communicator and tried to reach her, but the only response he got was a crackling sound. He tried Spock's frequency, but the result was the same. It was no use - there was something in the planet's atmosphere which interfered with the communicators occasionally. Spock had warned them about that even before they beamed down. Well, it didn't really matter. There wasn't any

emergency, and they'd return to the main camp in three days anyway to be picked up by the transporters.

It had all been carefully planned; a skeleton crew, changed each watch, on the ship, everyone else on the planet with nominally two days free, and three days of duty, but in actual fact the only work being done was by those conscientious souls whose work was also their hobby. There was no need to get worried; Siggi had probably gone for a walk.

McCoy dried his hair and glanced up at the sky. It was cloudless, and of a deep azure. The water of the creek had been cold and marvellously refreshing. McCoy yawned. The lush grass at the foot of an old tree was inviting. A scent of blossoms filled the air and made him lazy. A nap right now sounded good. He stretched out on the grass.

Blinking up at the sky, he soon let his mind wander. Siggi had been behaving quite strangely these last few days. After the conversation with Kirk, McCoy had tried to talk to her but she had withdrawn and kept out of his way as much as she could. It had taken some persuasion to convince her to come down to the planet, but now she seemed to be enjoying it. The incident at the turbolift must have embarrassed her. Probably she hadn't wanted to show her feelings for McCoy. He wondered whether his own daughter had gone through the same experience. Usually that phase was supposed to come at an earlier age, but Siggi had lost all the people dear to her, and she was also from a different time and had been raised in a different way. Yet McCoy knew that sooner or later he had to tell her that there couldn't be an affair between them.

He tried to analyse his feelings for her. Over the past weeks he had become more and more fond of her, and yet he was sure he wasn't in love with her. In a way he felt responsible for her, and quite often he had caught himself trying to compare her with his own daughter. Must be because he'd been away from home so long.

Joanna... Yes. He must spend his leave with her. And Siggi? There was nobody waiting for her on Earth. Perhaps he could take her along; Joanna probably wouldn't mind - she liked to have people around. And the peace among the oak trees and magnolias in the old-fashioned mansion would be good for Siggi.

Yes - he would ask her to come along, and inform his daughter about it in his next letter.

The air was heavy with the sweet scent of flowers and the birds were chirping in the trees above him. Slowly, McCoy's mind drifted off to sleep.

He woke in midafternoon, when Spock and the others returned to the camp. He rose, stretched and walked over to join them. Suddenly, it struck him that Siggi was still missing. He started to run, and reached the others, panting slightly. "Have you seen Siggi anywhere?" he gasped.

Spock raised an eyebrow at him. "No, Doctor. I thought she stayed in the camp with you."

"Spock, we need to do something immediately! She's been missing since noon. I tried to reach her via communicator, but the blasted thing didn't work. I thought she'd gone for a walk, then I fell asleep. Hell, I shouldn't have - "

"Calm down, Doctor." Spock pulled out his communicator, and tried to reach Siggi, without success. He flipped it shut and returned it to his belt. "The communicator is working all right now, but Miss Newman does not answer. I suggest we start looking for her immediately."

It was several hours until Siggi was found. She had slipped when trying to climb up a hillside, lost her communicator and sprained her ankle. It was the security guard who found her. He had to carry her back to the camp - the communicators were malfunctioning again.

After McCoy had bandaged her foot, Siggi fell into an exhausted sleep. A couple of hours later the rest of McCoy's team retired for the night too; but the doctor couldn't sleep. He was sitting at the almost dead fire, staring into the red embers when Spock found him.

The night was becoming rather chilly, but McCoy didn't feel it. He felt guilty; fortunately, Siggi wasn't severely injured. But this should not have happened. His behaviour was irresponsible and unpardonable; Siggi had gone off on her own and he had not started looking for her immediately. It seemed a hospitable planet, but even so, nobody should be on their own. He didn't dare imagine the things which could have happened to her...

Suddenly he felt a light tap on his shoulder. He looked up, startled. In the dim light he recognised the lean figure of the Vulcan First Officer.

"It's getting late, Doctor," Spock said quietly. "I think it would be wise to retire for the night."

McCoy looked up at the Vulcan. "I'll turn in shortly. I've just been thinking."

"It will get quite cold during the night, Doctor. You might - "

"Just leave me alone, Spock!" McCoy snapped. He then felt immediately sorry for what he had said. He looked up at Spock apologetically. "Sorry, I didn't mean it that way."

The Vulcan nodded slightly. "You are overly involved emotionally, and you are blaming yourself for what happened this afternoon. In addition," he added, glancing at the almost empty bottle next to McCoy, "you seem to have consumed rather a large quantity of alcohol."

McCoy rose, but once he had got to his feet, he swayed unsteadily. Spock extended a hand towards him. McCoy shook his head. "No, it's all right, Spock. I can manage," he said, almost toppling over. He had to grip the Vulcan's arm for support. "Well, I guess you're right. Better give me a hand."

McCoy hadn't felt the effects of the brandy while he was sitting at the fire, but now the effect was catching up rapidly with him. He tried to reach for the brandy bottle and almost lost his balance. Spock took the bottle from his hand and led him over to his tent. There, he locked it away inside a container. The Vulcan stayed on while McCoy tried to prepare for bed, babbling something about 'responsibility' under his breath. Finally, the doctor slumped in a sitting position on the edge of his bed and pulled his boots off.

Spock watched him for a moment and then walked up to the cot. "You

help nobody with reproaching yourself for what happened. Miss Newman should not have walked off on her own in the first place. You had better rest now."

McCoy stretched out on the cot. Except for his boots, he hadn't undressed. "Good night, Spock," he mumbled sleepily.

"Doctor, don't you think it would be wise to... " But McCoy was asleep. Spock hesitated for a moment, then he covered the sleeping figure carefully with the sleeping bag, turned down the light and left the tent.

McCoy was roused the next morning by busy noises outside his tent. Bright sunlight was flooding through the entrance. McCoy opened his eyes but closed them immediately again at the sight of the bright sunlight. His head seemed to be nothing but one throbbing agony. Finally, he got to his feet with a grunt and crossed over to the entrance. The day was going to be beautiful. The sun was already high in the sky.

Suddenly McCoy discovered that Siggi was hobbling busily around her own tent although he had ordered her last night to stay in bed. Smiling, McCoy noted that the young security guard was standing right next to her, and the two of them were engaged in some kind of conversation. He could hear Siggi's ringing laughter. Last night he had wanted her to beam back aboard, and only the malfunctioning communicators had prevented him from ordering it; now he was glad that he hadn't done it.

Ignoring his throbbing head, McCoy went down to the creek to wash and shave. When he reached the water, he suddenly was violently sick. He hadn't had this kind of hangover for a long time. He cleaned himself up and returned to camp. Spock was waiting for him in front of his tent.

"You are late for breakfast, Doctor."

"Don't talk about food, Spock," McCoy grunted.

After looking him over carefully, Spock said, "You appear to be suffering from the aftereffects of overindulgence in alcoholic beverages, Doctor."

McCoy started to reply, but a wave of nausea gripped him, and he swayed unsteadily. Instantaneously, Spock was at his side. "You had better lie down," the Vulcan said, leading him back to his cot. McCoy looked up at him, and saw a flicker of concern, which vanished almost immediately, in the First Officer's eyes.

"Ms. Rowlands and I will leave the camp to finish off some measurements we made yesterday. Mr. Simmons will stay in the camp with you and Ms. Newman." He paused. "You should take something to relieve the pain and nausea, Doctor," he added quietly.

"Don't worry, Spock - I will."

The Vulcan handed him his medikit and went to get a water bottle and a cup. "Rest, Doctor. We should be back by midafternoon."

McCoy slept for a few hours and then woke again. The pills he'd taken hadn't brought the relief he had expected. He attempted to get up, but a wave of dizziness convinced him otherwise.

A short time later, Siggi looked in on him. "You are awake now. How

do you feel, Doctor?"

"Lousy."

"Mr. Spock said you were ill, and I was getting worried."

"Crap! Now don't you start fussing about me too. I had too much brandy last night, that's all. But you can help me. Get the medikit and give me a shot. The pills I took aren't helping."

As the drug she gave him took effect, he relaxed somewhat. "And how about your foot? You know I told you to stay in bed." But McCoy smiled as he spoke.

Siggi blushed slightly. "It's so nice here. My foot doesn't hurt much. But..." She stopped abruptly. Immediately, McCoy's professional concern took over. His own headache and discomfort were forgotten; he sat up.

"Siggi, are you all right? What is it?"

"Nothing." She avoided meeting his eyes.

"Siggi - come on, you promised to tell me if something is wrong."

Looking down, she spoke in a low voice. "I'm feeling... strange. It started this morning. When I was with Mr. Simmons, I suddenly got awfully hot and nervous, and..."

McCoy interrupted her with a burst of laughter that made his sides ache. She looked at him, bewildered.

"Sorry, Siggi, but what you are suffering from is no disease. You should be familiar with it!" He couldn't help chuckling at her obvious confusion. "Jeff is a boy and you are a girl. In fact, rather an attractive one. Don't you understand?"

It took the information a while to sink in. When it finally came home to her what he meant, she shouted at him, "But I love you!"

"No," he said quietly. He took hold of her hand and pulled her down to a sitting position on the edge of his bed. "Siggi, listen. You could be my daughter. In fact, my own daughter is two years older than you."

"You don't understand me!" She had started crying. "I love you, but you didn't notice it."

"Yes, I did notice it. But hear me out, Siggi. I hoped you would realise the impracticality of the situation by yourself. I do like you very much, Siggi, but this isn't love."

"You told me about the death of your fiance. You didn't want to be hurt again, did you? Because of that, unconsciously you shrank back from all closer commitments. I was a safe choice for a 'lover' because you thought I wouldn't disappoint you. Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you?"

She sobbed quietly. "Nobody cares about me."

"Poppycock! Spock does, Jim does, I do... and everybody on the Enterprise does! I watched Jeff and you this morning, and you seemed to be getting along very well. Jeff is a nice guy. Try to get to know him. Now, hush. Ssshhhh."

With a visible effort she pulled herself together. She started to get up. "I'm sorry, Doctor. I... I'm ashamed."

"No, stay. Siggi, there's no need to be ashamed. Love exists in many different forms. How do you define what the word means? I love my work. I love my daughter Joanna. I'm very fond of you, too, Siggi - I guess you could call it love. Sit down, and I'll tell you something about my family and my home."

They were still engaged in quiet conversation when Spock and Rowlands returned to the camp. McCoy felt somewhat better, but he sensed that he was coming down with a cold.

The remaining two days of their 'expedition' passed quite uneventfully. Siggi spent a lot of time with Security Guard Simmons, but also took care of McCoy, who was nursing his cold. But rest and fresh air did more than all the doctor's drugs or therapy could have done; his cold was past its worst and Siggi's limp had become merely a trace by the time they had to leave.

Yet Spock insisted that the journey back to the main camp would be too much for either of them. The Vulcan had slightly altered the frequency of his communicator and was now able to reach the ship without any trouble.

After they'd been beamed back aboard, the three senior officers met in Kirk's quarters for a quiet evening and an unofficial discussion of their 'survey'. Kirk was suntanned, and looked rather relaxed.

McCoy grinned at him. "Did you get your bear, Jim?"

"Well, not exactly. One of the creatures almost got me. I had to climb a tree to get away from it until the rest of my team caught up with me and chased it away. That's where I got the bruises you treated this afternoon. And how do you rate the success of this unauthorised leave, Bones?"

"It was short, of course, but I also think it did a lot of good. Hope you don't have too much trouble writing your report, though - that would put you under stress again."

"I don't think there will be much trouble, Doctor," the Vulcan First Officer said. Even he looked quite relaxed. "You discovered some rare medicinal plants in abundance on this planet, which will undoubtedly be of value to the Federation - this alone will justify a survey as we conducted it. We obtained some good readings of the creature that will probably evolve into this planet's ruling intelligence; the Captain and his party surveyed another native species that appears to be at the top of the planet's evolutionary chain at present. There are some other readings that will be of value as well - probably as many as would have been obtained in a normal landing party survey carried out by a small group. I do not think there will be any trouble." He paused. "What I don't understand though is why I did not think of changing the communicator frequencies earlier. We would not have had those periods of lack of contact had we done that."

McCoy looked at the Vulcan thoughtfully. "Isn't it possible, Spock, that you too were simply overtired, so that it didn't come to your mind?"

Spock considered this thoughtfully. "It is very unlikely, Doctor - but of course, it is also a possibility which cannot entirely be dismissed."

Kirk looked at his two friends. "Well, I think that takes care of the business at hand. You two care for a shot of brandy now?"

McCoy made a face. The memory of his recent hangover was too fresh. "No, Jim, I'd rather not. I think I'll turn in now." He got up and left the room.

Spock rose also. "The Doctor is right. It's rather late."

Kirk's face fell, but then he smiled. "How about a game of chess, Spock?"

After a moment, Spock nodded. "Gladly, Jim."

McCoy was sitting on the porch of the old mansion his family had owned over the last four hundred years. It was the last evening of their eight-week home leave. Leaning back in his rocking chair, McCoy thought back over the last months.

After their 'survey' of the planet, Siggie's behaviour had changed. Through Jeff Simmons, Siggie had been introduced to the younger crew members. Simmons was generally liked, and Siggie was welcomed and accepted among his friends.

The crucial point had come when Siggie's friendship with Simmons broke up after only two weeks. Siggie had been broken-hearted and wept out her grief on McCoy's shoulder. Eventually she had overcome her disappointment.

Also, McCoy had told his daughter about the young woman they had rescued, and that he intended to bring her along with him on leave. He had been relieved when Joanna had invited them both warmly.

The past eight weeks had been wonderful. The two young women got along easily. For a fortnight they had toured the important places of Earth to introduce Siggie to the way it was in the twenty-third century. Even though Siggie had been immensely interested, it was only after they returned to McCoy's home that she gradually relaxed. She had settled in fast, enjoying the countryside and making friends with the neighbours.

McCoy was happy to see his daughter and his protegee getting on so well. But once again the question of Siggie's future had arisen in his mind.

Sure, Starfleet had become sort of a home to her, but she had no relatives... McCoy had pondered his idea for quite some time, then he had discussed it with his daughter. He planned to adopt Siggie formally. Not only had Joanna agreed to his plan, she had been delighted. In the short time they had spent together she had grown to love Siggie.

McCoy had seen that the formalities were taken care of immediately. It had taken a few weeks to get the papers legally approved.

Apart from Joanna, he had spoken only to Kirk about it; Siggie did not know yet. He had only received the legal approval last night. Tonight he was going to tell Siggie.

She wasn't home yet. She had been taken horseback riding by some friends in the neighbourhood.

McCoy's musings were interrupted by the sound of an aircar coming to a halt at the gateway. Laughter and shouting rang over to him. Siggi jumped out of the aircar, waving happily as her friends drove away.

She came running down the driveway. Panting slightly, she came to a halt in front of McCoy.

He rose. "Howdy." Smiling, he added, "I guess you enjoyed yourself."

She nodded. "It was great. But it hurts to say goodbye to my friends."

"I know, a farewell is never easy." Putting an arm around her, McCoy grinned. "Come on, let's go inside. You must be starving?"

"I am. What's for dinner, Bones?" Without hesitation, she was now using the affectionate nickname Kirk had given his Chief Medical Officer.

"I don't know. Joanna said it's a surprise."

The meal was substantial and delicious as usual. After dinner, they settled in the old-fashioned chairs around the fireplace. The matter about the adoption itself was told fast and easily, but McCoy found the reaction quite overwhelming. Tears, hugs, then simple joy and quiet conversation. They talked until early morning. Once Siggi asked if she had to call him 'Dad' now. McCoy replied, smiling.

"I think 'Bones' will do."

Finally McCoy retired for the night, leaving the two young women who were still engaged in conversation as it looked as if they might carry it on till morning. As he said goodnight, Siggi said, "Jo and I have still so much to tell each other, and I too am leaving tomorrow." Then, glancing at the clock on the wall, she added with a grin, "Better make that today."

As McCoy stretched out on the bed, he stared through the open window at the dark night sky. This parting would be even harder, yet McCoy was glad that Siggi had found a home. She would accompany him back to San Francisco where she had chosen to stay for a six month course at Starfleet Academy. But she didn't want to remain on Earth. After she had completed her studies, she would return to space. She would probably return to the Enterprise. McCoy smiled. Siggi had adapted quite well, and the time on Earth would do her good - yet like him, she considered the Enterprise her home.

Well, now she had two homes, just in case... You never knew what happened...

McCoy was becoming drowsy. They'd have to leave very early.

He wouldn't wait so long until his next home leave...

Slowly, McCoy's thoughts drifted off to sleep.

Back on board the Enterprise, McCoy was unusually quiet. When his shift was over, Kirk went to see his friend. "Something wrong, Bones?"

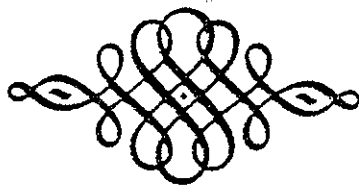
McCoy looked up from his desk. "No, not really. I've just been thinking. You know, it's been almost half a year since Siggi came board... and now six months seem so long.. "

"They'll be over before you know it. Anyway, Siggi is planning to come back to the Enterprise, isn't she?"

"Yeah. Still, I miss her."

"We all do - even Spock said he was looking forward to seeing her back at her post after the training course - mainly, of course 'because her additional knowledge will be beneficial to the ship'. I think in his own way he's become quite fond of her." Kirk paused. "How about a brandy now? You're off duty, Bones, aren't you?"

McCoy rose, smiling. "Yes, gladly. But only one." He grinned. "You know, Jim, Siggi said I should watch it..."



we belong to tomorrow

by
LINDA WOOD

If it proves to be true about reincarnation
Then all us Star Trekkers have a special mission
For in this life we have learned to respect
Peace, IDIC and love and alien intellect.

We strive to make a world where in three hundred years
All races and creeds live together without fears -
To work together to reach out in space -
Yes, together, as one, the Human Race.

Reborn three hundred years from now
We will readily take the Starfleet's vow
And some of us will leap through the starlit night
Aboard the real Enterprise in wondrous starflight.

Ambassadors of Sol, the pride of Mankind,
Sharing peace, IDIC and love with whoever we find
Knowing now, in this life, wherever we go,
We will live in the future, we belong to tomorrow!



CHANGE OF OUTLOOK

by

VICKI RICHARDS

The experiment that Dr. Keith Edwards had been working on went completely wrong yet again, and with a sigh that owed more to frustration than anger, he sank back into a heap on his laboratory stool. How was he ever going to help his patients? The whole colony was affected now, with very few exceptions, and he was under no illusions as to how long it would be before he and his assistant were stricken by the strange fever too. Straightening, he stood up and returned to the wards, only to be assailed by that dreadful feeling of helplessness again, when he saw the prone figures suffering there. He had to do something - but what? The colony was one which deliberately had no contact with Earth; at the outset, their philosophy had been self-sufficiency, perhaps a return to the simpler days of existence. As a result of which, now that they really needed help, they couldn't call for it. Edwards made his round of the beds, able to do nothing more than talk to them, and to note the deterioration of his patients in the last few hours. Then with a quick nod to his assistant, he went back to his lab and more fruitless research.

His assistant watched him go, then turned back to her work, doing all she could to make the patients as comfortable as possible. There was little else either she or Dr. Edwards *could* do for them. They were all going to die, she had no doubt of that, unless the doctor could find a cure, and that didn't seem likely with the limited equipment he had. During the last few weeks she had begun to wonder if self-sufficiency, with its attendant isolation, was really worth it. But then that had been her parents' decision, not hers.

She walked to where a young man in a makeshift bed at the edge of the room was moaning in pain, and injected some of their very last supply of tranquilliser. Then she looked up, and not quite knowing why, looked towards the doorway. In it stood a kind of person she had never seen before.

"Excuse me for interrupting your work," said the stranger in his deep voice. "Unfortunately I was forced to land my shuttlecraft, and my ship will not be within communications range for several days, or I should not have intruded upon your privacy. But I see that you are in need of assistance."

"We are," replied Medical Assistant Rowan Mason, finally finding her tongue after the shock of seeing her first Vulcan. "Can you help? We have been unable to identify the strain of this disease, and almost all the colonists are affected now. Your shuttlecraft will have computers, won't it?"

"Indeed. Also I have this." Spock held up his science tricorder. "Perhaps I can be of help."

"Whether or not you can help, that tricorder will," said a new voice. Edwards had returned, and though more than surprised at the sight of the first Vulcan he had seen in a good twenty years, he was not the least bit off balance. He knew that the tricorder was a lifeline, but he just hoped

that the Vulcan wasn't going to upset the patients. He had been doing all he could to show them sympathy and understanding; he didn't want Vulcan logic upsetting the only thing he had been able to do for them.

"Who are you?" asked Edwards as politely as he could - though really all he wanted to do was get his hands on the Vulcan's tricorder.

"Commander Spock, of the U.S.S. Enterprise," came the reply. "As I explained to your assistant, I regret the intrusion on your privacy, but the shuttlecraft in which I was returning from a scientific expedition developed a malfunction in the fuel system; it is not serious, but I was forced to land. The part needed to effect repairs is not carried on board, so therefore I must wait for my ship to collect me. I have communicated with the Enterprise, and she will arrive in two point three seven days."

But Edwards had hardly heard anything he said; he was more intent on getting his hands on the precious tricorder. Seeing that Edwards was probably going to try to take it, Spock handed it over anyway, a curious expression on his face. The man was totally preoccupied, but then that was hardly surprising.

"You couldn't fix your shuttlecraft, then?" asked Rowan, feeling somehow in awe of the tall alien, but wanting to get him to talk; she had never seen an alien before. And he was wearing what she knew to be Starfleet uniform, so surely he had to be all right. The self-imposed isolation of the colony had not been her doing, and though she had been brought up within this philosophy, she had never been completely certain that it was right.

"I could have repaired the malfunction," replied Spock, noting that Edwards' assistant, at least, exhibited some Human curiosity - a trait of the species that Spock could understand well. "But I would have had to use parts from several other of the shuttlecraft's systems, and when I contacted the Enterprise, I discovered that her orders had been changed, and she was nearer to this planet than I had expected. Therefore she will be in orbit before I would have been able to rendezvous, and my more logical course of action was to wait."

"Never mind all that, Spock - or whatever your name is!" interrupted Edwards. He was totally unable to get the tricorder to work. "Come and show me how to work this device!"

Edwards marched off to his lab, and Spock followed. The Vulcan noticed the antiquated equipment, the failed experiments. He doubted if Edwards had been going about his research in the correct manner at all.

"What I want you to tell me is this," Edwards began in his schoolmasterly manner, holding out the tricorder to Spock as if reluctant to relinquish his hold on it. "I want you to tell me how to operate it so that I can discover the antidote for this sickness that's killing off all my people!"

"Perhaps it would be better if I operated the tricorder, Doctor," replied Spock, diplomatically. "I am the Science Officer of the Enterprise, and I have had experience of such work before. I have worked in conjunction with the ship's Chief Medical Officer many times."

"Pah! Vulcan doctors!" said Edwards impatiently, looking as if he might snatch the tricorder back at any second if Spock didn't start working. "What would they know about Humans? I don't suppose Vulcans would even get this disease!"

"The Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise would be most upset to be

called Vulcan, Dr. Edwards." Spock went over to a bench and carefully began to clear a space amongst Edwards' antiquated paraphernalia. "The majority of the Enterprise's crew is Human."

Edwards watched silently for a moment, taken quite aback. He had not known that Federation starships worked like that. For some reason he had supposed that they would be manned wholly by the members of one race. So this Vulcan worked amongst Humans, did he? Suddenly Edwards was aware that he had been rude to the Vulcan, who had, after all, offered his assistance; but then he had been rude to a lot of people lately, his mind had been so preoccupied with the all-conquering disease afflicting his patients.

He looked at the tall figure working at the bench again; was there something that he had missed? His comment about the ship's medical officer had been almost lighthearted, certainly cryptic. Then he saw the speed and efficiency with which the blue-shirted Starfleet Officer was working, and decided that he was, after all, just like other Vulcans. It had been a very long time since he had seen a Vulcan, or seen anyone not belonging to the colony, after all. Not that he cared how many Vulcan traits the stranger displayed, if he could find a cure for the disease. Privately, Edwards doubted that there was one to find. Just as long as this Commander didn't bother his patients...

The doctor had finally retired to his room, exhausted from the long days of work and fruitless research, when Spock finally emerged from his research. It was the middle of the night, and only a few subdued lights were showing when he returned to the hospital ward in search of either Edwards or his assistant.

Rowan Mason was keeping her habitual through-the-night watch on the patients. She was sitting at a table, trying to read a book during one of the short spells when all of the patients were either quiet or asleep at the same time, when she saw the tall Vulcan silently enter the ward. She knew that her first concern should be that he might have found some answer to their problems, and truly that was her concern. But she could not hide from herself that she was glad he had been forced to land his shuttlecraft and to come here. Having lived all her life within the colony, she had never seen any beings other than Humans, and up till then all her knowledge of other worlds and peoples had come out of library books, some of them very out of date. And from the very moment the Vulcan Spock had walked into the medical centre, she had just *known* that he was a very interesting person indeed.

Spock approached the table, and quietly set his tricorder down. The young woman looked at him curiously, but did not speak.

"I believe I have identified the strain of disease," Spock replied in answer to the unspoken question, but quietly so that he would not waken any of the sleepers. "It is a virus related to Rigellian fever, although not so quick to kill. The research carried out by Dr. Edwards was an excellent help, and prevented my having to disturb any of the patients for further data."

"He'll be pleased about that," said the girl quietly, noting the Vulcan's concern for those who were sick. "Why don't you go and tell him what you've discovered? He'll be in his room, and he'll want to know if there is an antidote available."

"There is, but not here," replied Spock. "When the Enterprise arrives, it will not take Dr. McCoy long to isolate the antidote. But I

will not waken Dr. Edwards now - it would be illogical to disturb him from sleep which he needs for information which he can receive in the morning."

"You're probably right," conceded Rowan, noticing his consideration for a man who had been undeniably rude to him. "But what about you? Do you want to sleep? I'm sure there's an empty room somewhere."

"I am not in need of sleep," came the reply. "But it appears you are in need of assistance. My research indicates that the illness progresses to a stage when the sufferers become delirious and difficult to control. If you will accept any help I can give, I will be glad to give it."

"I have always managed before, but - thank you, I would be very grateful for your help." Rowan Mason couldn't help looking at him more curiously than ever; he just didn't fit in with what she had heard about Vulcans. True, he was highly intelligent and logical, and without emotion to all outward appearances. Yet she wondered. She had been nursing the sick for too long not to recognise someone who cared.

The long night passed slowly; and Spock's help was certainly needed. With careful nursing, and with the luck whose existence he usually denied, all those now suffering from the sickness should survive at least until the Enterprise could arrive. McCoy would be able to take over then, and he had no doubts that the good doctor would save them, no matter what his public comments on the Chief Medical Officer's abilities might be. But the hours until the starship arrived would still seem a very long time for all of them.

Edwards finally surfaced, grumpy that his exhaustion had made him sleep far longer than he had intended. The first thing he saw on entering the ward was Rowan Mason asleep in her chair, and the Vulcan doing her job for her. Heaven knew how much he would have upset the patients - they needed the Human touch to ease their suffering - not cold logic!

"Miss Mason - wake up!" ordered Edwards in no uncertain terms. Spock finished settling the patient whose pillows he had been adjusting, and came over. He had an idea the young assistant might need defending.

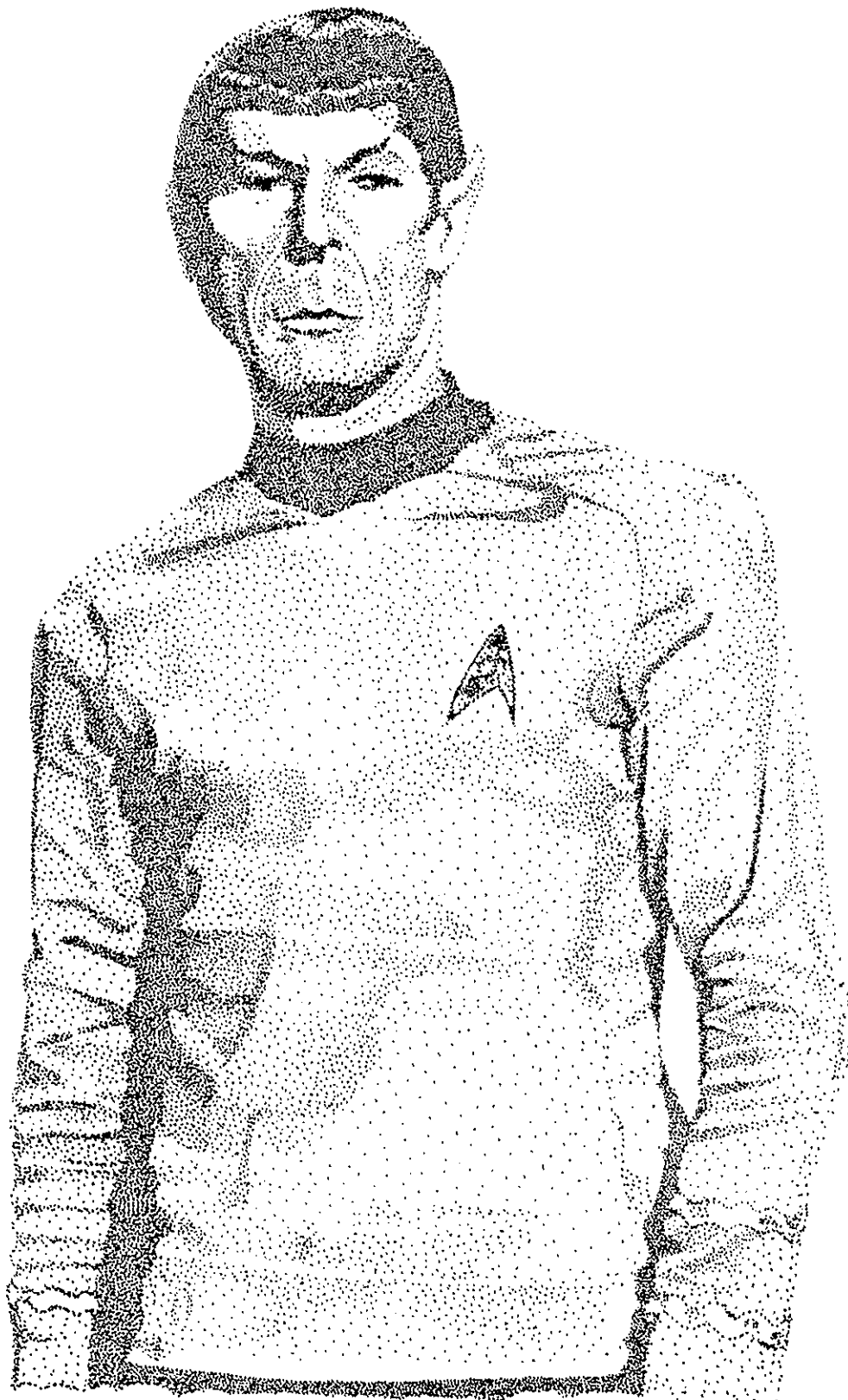
Rowan opened her eyes, annoyed with herself for having dropped off, to realise that here was someone who was even more annoyed with her.

"Oh - Dr. Edwards," she began, not properly awake. "I'm sorry I fell asleep, but - it seemed a good idea to sit and rest for a few minutes. especially since Mr. Spock was here. I didn't mean to fall asleep."

"Then you should not have been on duty - you should have called me." Edwards seemed really displeased. "It is gross negligence to leave the patients to the mercies of someone who is not only inexperienced, but who is incapable of compassion!"

Spock was about to point out that it was quite possible to care for them using logic, that the medical assistant had taken the only logical course in taking the opportunity to get some rest, but before he could open his mouth, he found *himself* being hotly defended.

"That's not fair, Dr. Edwards!" Rowan exclaimed rather loudly, jumping to her feet. "You weren't here - you haven't seen how well he's looked after them. You didn't hear how he talked to them when they were delirious and he thought I couldn't hear. He *does* care, and you've no right to speak to him like that!" She hadn't really cared about her superior scolding her



Saan 8402

- she knew his worry for the patients made him irritable. But to criticise the Vulcan, who had been such a help, really made her see red.

"I appreciate that you are tired, Miss Mason," replied Edwards, not quite understanding what had made his assistant so cross - he had never seen her like that before. "We both are. But you *should* have called me. Mr. Spock, though it is thoughtful of him to help, is not a doctor, nor is he capable of understanding Human emotional needs."

"He might not be a doctor, but he's worked with doctors before," insisted Rowan. "And he must understand Humans, because he works with them all the time. Anyway, I *know* he understands - I've seen how gentle he is!"

"Please, do not upset yourself on my behalf, Miss Mason," said Spock when he was finally able to get a word in. "If the Doctor does not wish me to help with the patients, then I will not, although I was glad to do what I could. If Dr. Edwards will come with me to his laboratory, I will discuss with him the findings I have made about this illness."

Rowan Mason watched him go; Dr. Edwards behind him, a faintly surprised look on his face. He had not expected the Vulcan to react like that. But she had had to say something - Edwards had been so unfair! She had to smile at the ease with which Spock had been able to defuse the situation, and she was certain that there had been in his manner a certain amount of - embarrassment? Probably at her description of him. She was sure that he wasn't as completely logical and emotionless as he appeared to be. She also knew how sorry she was going to be when his ship came and took him away.

By the time the Enterprise did arrive, even Dr. Edwards had been impressed by the quiet efficiency with which the Vulcan worked. He was even beginning to think that perhaps shutting themselves away on the colony wasn't as good an idea as it had once seemed. Maybe when things got back to normal, increased contact with the galaxy outside might well benefit them all. But for the moment, his greatest concern was still his patients.

Dr. Edwards stood outside the medical centre with his assistant and the Vulcan, and watched while two figures materialised several feet in front of them. One wore the uniform of a Starship Captain; the other - and more importantly as far as Edwards was concerned - wore that of a Starship's Chief Medical Officer. What he hadn't been prepared for was the expressions on both their faces as they greeted the Vulcan.

"Spock! Thank goodness you're okay!" The Captain stepped forward and grasped the Vulcan's shoulder. "When we got your message that you'd had to put the Columbus down, I was beginning to get worried!"

"Yes, Spock," put in the doctor. "I've had quite enough practice at working on that weird Vulcan physiology to last me a lifetime. You're going to have to promise to look after yourself better! Now, where are those patients you've found me? The sooner they're transferred up to sickbay, the happier I'll be!"

Edwards shook the Medical Officer's and the Captain's hands as the Vulcan introduced them. Over the past hours, he had finally come to realise that Commander Spock was, after all, quite safe to let near his patients, and his work on the disease had been invaluable. Even more, he was actually beginning to understand Mason's surprising outburst in his defence. It seemed she had seen something straight away in their visitor that he hadn't. Now, when he saw the way the two Starship officers greeted

him, as a dear and valued friend, and saw the undemonstrative but unmistakeable warmth with which the Vulcan greeted them, he found that he felt a little ashamed... and envious of such a friendship.

Several hours later, the patients had all been transferred to the Enterprise, where they would remain until McCoy decided they were recovered sufficiently to return to the colony. Dr. Edwards and his assistant accompanied them.

The equipment in the starship's sickbay was enough to make the colony doctor turn green with envy. He and the recovering colonists had decided that from then on they would not be so isolated; perhaps they could take the best of both ways; the advantages the Federation had to offer and the peace their own simple way of life offered. It wasn't inconceivable for the two to live side by side.

One thing Edwards had learned, as during his stay on the Enterprise he had observed the way of life on that very special ship, was that friendship could, and should, be a natural condition, not of the Human race only, but of all peoples. He saw it in the way that everyone on board her smiled at each other and seemed to enjoy being there working with each other, from the lowliest ensign right up to the Captain.

He had an idea that a lot of the responsibility for the happy atmosphere on the U.S.S. Enterprise lay on the shoulders of Captain James T. Kirk. And also on the shoulders of the Vulcan. Edwards knew that, when he and the other colonists returned to the planet below, he was never going to forget that he had witnessed that very special friendship. Yes, he had to admit that he had learned a lot.

They stood in the transporter room, ready to leave. Edwards was already on the platform when Rowan Mason entered. She came to say goodbye, and refrained from giving Spock the kiss on the cheek she wanted to. Instead, she just shook his hand, as she shook Kirk's and McCoy's.

"Goodbye, my friends, and thank you," she said simply, before stepping onto the platform.

Then they shimmered, and were gone. McCoy turned to Kirk and Spock and led them from the room.

"Miss Mason seems to think Dr. Edwards will be less irritable in future," said McCoy mischievously. "She seems to think Spock's taught him something about getting along with people, though I can't imagine what."

"Bones," Kirk replied before Spock could say a word, "if Spock can get along with you, he certainly does know something about it."

McCoy stopped then and stood there while Kirk and Spock carried on along the corridor. "Jim!" exclaimed the Doctor. "How dare you join in! Don't you know that this argument is mine and Spock's? It's our fun, not yours!"

Kirk couldn't help but laugh at McCoy's nonsensical statement, and he had a feeling that Spock did too. Companionably, the three of them went along together. They all knew that they had something special; if someone else had profited by it, then that had to be good.

I am the Captain of the Enterprise

by

LINDA WOOD

(With sincere apologies to Sir W S Gilbert)

KIRK I am the captain of the Enterprise -
CREW And he's really quite dishy, too!
KIRK I'm never, never rude,
I'm a real smart dude
And you are the Fleet's best crew.
CREW He's never, never rude,
He's a real smart dude
And we are the Fleet's best crew.
KIRK I'm a son of the stars
From Sol to Antares
And my starship with pride I rule.
I'm never known to shirk
From long hours of extra work
And I never, never lose my cool!
CREW What, never?
KIRK No, never!
CREW What, never?
KIRK Hardly ever!
CREW He hardly ever loses his cool!
Then give three cheers to reach the skies
For the perfect Captain of the Enterprise;
Then give three cheers to reach the skies
For the Captain of the Enterprise.

KIRK I do my best to keep the ship intact -
CREW And with you any danger we'd face.
KIRK Well, thank you very much
My debt to you is such
That without you she'd never be in space.
CREW We thank you very much
And your debt to us is such
That without us she'd never be in space.
KIRK With Spock and Bones and Scott
We never will get caught
And survive with great success
And though 'Blast it' I may
Occasionally say
I never use a big, big "S".
CREW What, never?
KIRK No, never!
CREW What, never?
KIRK Well, hardly ever.
CREW Hardly ever swears with a big, big "S"
Then give three cheers to reach the skies
For the peerless Captain of the Enterprise
Then give three cheers to reach the skies
For the Captain of the Enterprise.

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

by

KAREN HAYDEN

Spock sat up suddenly in his bed, flinging the sheets violently out of his way, and forced himself to concentrate on his immediate surroundings. Uncharacteristically it took him several minutes to realise that there was no danger to him or to his companion. Instead, the knowledge that he was alone was what had wakened him sank into his mind, and his eyes strayed to the bed on the other side of the room, knowing that he would find it empty. The sheets were in disarray, thrown to the floor, as were several items of clothing.

The Vulcan sighed. It was happening all over again, as it had happened on every night during this week. He should have known, should not have been surprised, should not have allowed sleep to claim him as it had. He should have been there when needed... Chastising himself for a self-recrimination that had no purpose he crept from his own bed, grateful that he had at least had the foresight to sleep fully clothed on this night, for the darkness held a chill which he found most unpleasant, to say the least. But he would endure that - for *him*.

He plucked a thermal blanket from a pile beside the other bed, then headed for the door, his aim to go once more to the side of the man who would have need of him.

A small smile touched his lips as he once again found his Captain standing beneath the orange canopy which surrounded their cabin, his back against the same tree, his face upturned to witness the same sight which he had eagerly sought each night before. He had pulled on his trousers, but his arms were folded across his bare chest, his face shining with a smile of pure contentment. Gently, quietly, Spock went to his side, and draped the blanket about Kirk's shoulders before settling himself on a nearby boulder, and allowing himself to take in the sight which claimed the Human's total attention.

"Jim, the constellations are ever-changing, but the stars remain. No matter where we are, how far we travel, they will always be there. You insist on keeping a vigil over them as if you expect them to change... to disappear..."

James T. Kirk dragged his attention away from the intoxicating sight of his stars, and smiled at his friend, his face becoming even more animated as the lion-eyes sparkled in the faint light, acknowledging Spock's presence and the truth in his words.

"Can't help it. It's me. The way I am."

"I know." Spock's voice was quiet.

"Yes, you do. You know me better than I know myself. I suppose..." He took a deep breath. "That. Up there..." He swung his arm upwards, his hand pointing to the pinpoints of light far above them. "It's my life, the force that drives me, keeps me going. And when I'm away from her..." He sighed. "I just feel lost. Afraid of losing everything if I don't come out here and keep close."

Again Kirk sighed, and stretched his shoulders. "Can't sleep... All I can see, all I want to see, are the stars." He pushed himself up off the tree and walked the few yards to the cliff edge. "Crazy, huh?"

"Never." The Vulcan followed Kirk, standing close but not touching. "I do understand."

"How? My friend, how can you understand what I don't myself? Ever since we talked in the transporter room when we were trying to reunite my wolf with my lamb... You knew then what I was trying to say, even though I couldn't find the words. You knew before, too, and you've known since - so many times. You always know." Kirk swung round to face Spock, somehow needing to know exactly how and why they had such a unique symbiosis. "How?"

Spock did not flinch from the penetrating look, did not try to move away. "I cannot put into words what I myself cannot wholly comprehend. Jim, I accept. Can't you?"

Kirk's eyes softened, and he did not have to consider that. "You're right, of course, as you always are. What we have is unique, special, and doesn't need explanation or analysis. I do accept. I do." He shook his head, then, gesturing at the world about them. "But how this ever came about... How I ever deserved it... " Incrédulous, he stared upwards again, as if the stars themselves could somehow give him the answer that he and Spock could not give themselves.

So black. So beautiful. An alien sky in daytime, yet at night it looked the same as any other.

This time the silence was broken by Spock's voice, again quiet.

"Beautiful dreamer... "

Kirk roused himself, smiling, not quite comprehending as he saw that Spock's eyes were firmly fixed upon him. "What?"

"A song. A very old song. I remember my mother playing it. Long ago... " Spock answered as Kirk replied,

"I don't think I know it."

"I think of it... and I think of you. The words fit." He began to recite some of those words. *Beautiful dreamer, share a dream with me... Dream on and on through eternity... You're different, special...*

"Since I've known you, I've begun to realise what I had missed - before. You have made my existence into a life. You shared your dreams with me, and made them into my reality. I believe now - because of you. I know that dreams can come true." Spock hesitated, to look up at the sky as Kirk had done moments before, then returned his gaze to Kirk himself. "You will continue to dream dreams through all eternity, Jim, and I will remain at your side, to share them, to help you to live them. I am different. But you are special."

Touched beyond belief, unable to find the words, Jim Kirk found himself repeating Spock's name over and over as he sank to his knees beside the Vulcan and faced him. Savouring the feel of the moist grass beneath him, the feel of the dark, dark gaze upon him, the full meaning of what Spock had said finally sank into his numbed brain.

So long... For so long he had hoped that Spock would open up to him, would admit that he felt the same way about their unique friendship as Kirk

himself did. Now...

"You've waited a long time to say that, Spock."

Spock broke the eye contact. "It was a clumsy way of saying thank you... "

Kirk grasped the Vulcan's upper arms, his eyes as moist as the grass beneath them. "Not clumsy at all, Spock. You couldn't have said it a better way."

Spock nodded, acknowledging the words. "Each night I have followed you, but... I couldn't... I am Vulcan." As if that explained everything, Spock set his jaw.

Kirk felt a large lump form in his throat but forced the words past it. "And now, on our last night... "

"It needed to be said. Before it was too late."

"There will be other shore leaves."

"Yes. But none like this first one. You needed to get away from the ship. I needed to forget that... I almost lost you."

Kirk shuddered, and moved his hands from the Vulcan's arms to hug himself. The memories of what had happened, of how his hidden self had been given free reign on his ship through that transporter accident were too clear. Nearly two months had passed, but it was still as clear in his mind as if it had happened only yesterday. It still hurt, and now Spock's pain increased Kirk's a millionfold. But there wasn't just pain. There was joy too, at the memory of how Spock had stayed at his side through it all, never doubting him, always supportive. They helped each other to their feet.

"Thank you, Spock. For all you have ever done for me, for being here now. For being there, standing by me... then. For agreeing to be a part of my future... "

Kirk's mind replayed the scene only days before in his cabin, when he had had to inform Spock of Starfleet's offer of his own Captaincy. He had feared for what might happen, feared losing Spock, but he knew how much Spock deserved it and would not have stood in his way. But Spock had declined, had told him that he did not desire a command of his own; and Kirk had seen the look behind the words, the wordless message which had been deep within those dark, dark eyes. He had seen the truth, the real reason, what Spock had been unable to put into words - that the Vulcan would never leave his side. Ever. Kirk was his home, and his life.

Later, Spock had told Kirk that he had arranged a much needed leave, a special leave in a special place, and, thrilled, Kirk had eagerly agreed and accepted. Now here they were. And finally, things were being said that had needed to be said for so long. They had been there for a week, would leave tomorrow to face a future that was always unsure, but they would face it together. Always - together.

"Thank you, Spock - for being you."

No more was said. No more was needed.

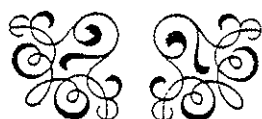
They returned to the cabin side by side, as it was meant to be, leaving the stars to shine and to await their return, knowing that the dawn would break with a wonder as great as the acknowledged wonder of their

friendship. Kirk knew that the things Spock had just said to him would probably never be repeated, especially once they had returned to their ship. But he was content. He had heard, had believed, and he would forever treasure those words. And he knew that he would never lose everything, for Spock would always be there.

Next morning, before beam-up. Kirk did find the words to say one more thing to his friend.

"You are *not* different, Spock. You are you. Unique. Special. And I am honoured to call you friend."

They looked at each other, each knowing that such words would have caused the Vulcan acute embarrassment if they had been said anywhere but in this special place. Spock filed them away carefully, but said nothing in return. He could tell, just by looking at Kirk, that the look in his eyes had said it all.



This Special Place

by

KAREN HAYDEN

How long did it take
For me to realise
The specialness of this place... ?
Was it when he smiled at me,
Or when his eyes met mine
In understanding?
Was it when he reached out
With open hands, arms
Of understanding and acceptance?
Was it when I realised
That there were hopes and dreams and trust
Offered willingly,
And a new life
That I had never known before... ?
All of these things made me realise
The silent words 'I care!'
Just *him*...

Wherever he is, it is special.





AH.

The Silent Time

by

LINDA C WOOD

CAPTAIN'S LOG, Stardate 5304.7:

In pursuance of Starfleet instructions, I have now returned Ambassador Thelev to Andoria and am returning to Starbase 11 for further orders.

Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise punched off the log recorder and sat back in his command seat.

"Mr. Sulu, ahead warp factor 4."

"Aye, sir," replied Sulu, his fingers flying over the helm controls. They had proceeded on course for two shiptime hours when Spock, silently working at his post, suddenly sat bolt upright. Kirk did not see the movement, but Uhura did. Alarmed at the look of shock on the normally expressionless face, she moved over to his side.

"Mr. Spock? Is anything wrong?"

Kirk swung round, shot out of the command chair and was at Spock's side before the Vulcan moved. "Spock?" Kirk's voice was anxious.

Spock's breath came out as a sob; he covered his ears for a moment with his hands, then turned to face his Captain.

"Captain, I felt... something... from a Vulcan ship - something painful for a second, and then... nothing."

"Mr. Chekov - scan for any ships in this vicinity. Mr. Sulu, reduce speed to warp factor one."

A chorus of "Aye, sir" came from the helm and navigation seats.

"Do you feel anything now, Spock?"

"No, Captain, nothing at all."

"Sir," came Chekov's voice. "I'm getting a trace of an ion trail at the outermost reaches of the scanner."

"Give the co-ordinates to Mr. Sulu and proceed in that direction. Warp factor 5, Mr. Sulu."

"Mr. Spock, consult your computer to find out ships' movements in this sector."

"I have done, Captain, and there appears to be a freighter, the T'Ming, proceeding to Vulcan with a shipment of dilithium crystals. Ship's complement of four."

"That must be it, Spock. Sulu, see if you - "

But Kirk did not complete the sentence. "Captain! Klingon battleship at one parsec and closing!"

"Battle stations. All shields operational. Phaser banks ready!"

However, the battlecruiser matched intricate speeds with the Enterprise, and flew in a parallel course at a half parsec distance.

"Hm, that's strange," mused Kirk aloud. "Wonder what... "

Suddenly, a piercing noise tore through his brain. He saw Spock clamping his hands over his ears, scream once in agony, then crumple to the floor unconscious. He saw the viewscreen shatter into a million pieces, spraying everyone with flying fragments, and he saw the bridge crew, hands to heads, staggering about in helpless pain before he, too, lost consciousness.

Kirk's return to awareness was sudden - he felt a hand on his shoulder and opened his eyes to see the concerned face of Sulu over him. "Captain! Captain, are you all right?"

Kirk quickly got to his feet. "Yes, Mr. Sulu. And you?"

"Yes, sir - but look at the bridge!"

Every viewscreen was shattered, but everyone was regaining consciousness and returning to their positions. Everyone, that is, except Spock.

"Spock!" Kirk was at the still-unconscious Vulcan's side immediately. He was lying with his hands over his elegant ears and a look of pain stamped on his face.

"Spock!" Kirk shook the lean shoulder anxiously, and was immeasurably relieved to hear a low moan being emitted from deep in the Vulcan's throat. The brown eyes flickered open and focused on his Captain.

"Spock, are you all right?"

A look of puzzlement crossed Spock's face. He rubbed his ears and shook his head from side to side.

"Spock, answer me! Are you all right?"

The look of puzzlement quickly changed to one of shocked realisation. Slowly, he picked himself up off the deck, stood to attention in front of Kirk, and said, "Captain, I regret to inform you that the sonic attack has left me - quite deaf."

"No! Can't you hear me, Spock? Can't you hear anything?"

Kirk's hands were on Spock's arms, a look of disbelief on his face.

"I am unable to hear, Captain. However, whilst you maintain physical contact with me, I can read your thoughts."

Instinctively, Kirk broke contact with Spock, then returned his hands to Spock's arms when he realised what he had done.

"Hang on, Spock, I'll get McCoy up here immediately," and he broke contact and punched the sickbay button.

"Bones, are you all right?"

"Yes, Jim, but sickbay looks like a bomb had hit it."

"Bones, get up here immediately. It's Spock - he's deaf!"

"Oh, no. On my way, Jim."

"Sulu - where's that Klingon?"

"He's gone, sir, and I have no trace of an ion trail with which to follow him."

"Blast! Must've warped into hyperspace immediately after the attack. Any sign of the Vulcan ship?"

"Yes, sir, I have it on the scanner, but without the viewscreen I can't get a picture of her."

"Maintenance, top priority - replace all viewscreens on the bridge."

"Aye, sir," came the reply from the besieged maintenance department.

"Mr. Sulu, join up with the Vulcan ship. E.T.A.?"

"Five minutes, sir."

"Very well."

The turbolift doors swished open and McCoy strode in. Kirk, still standing beside Spock with his hand on his arm, said, "See what you can do for him, Bones. He says he can only hear when I touch him."

"Oh, my God. Spock, come with me." McCoy took him by the arm and led him down to sickbay.

"Lt. Uhura - is your hearing O.K.? You had the space microphone in your ear when we were attacked."

"Sir, I feel a dullness in that ear, but it's wearing off quickly."

"Better go with Bones too, and get checked out. Call up your relief officer. Oh, and call that Vulcan ship please."

"I've been trying to contact it since the first report of its whereabouts came in, sir, but it's not responding to my call."

"Has it altered course?"

"No, sir, it's still en route to Vulcan." She made way for her relief.

"Looks as if Spock's not the only Vulcan who's been made deaf. Still, it'll have us on visual. Lt. Clyde, patch me through on their viewscreen."

The relief communications officer deftly operated his controls as Uhura left the bridge. "You're through, sir."

"This is Captain Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise calling the T'Ming - are you receiving me?"

Only space static was heard on the bridge intercom. The maintenance crew arrived with a replacement screen and started working on it.

Kirk turned to Lt. Clyde again. "Lieutenant, are we within transcript telecom distance?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Send a fax across to them, saying we wish permission to board them and assist with their medical problems."

Clyde did so, receiving a fax back. "Permission granted."

Kirk punched the sickbay comm button. "Bones - how's Spock?"

"When you've got a minute, will you please come down, Jim?"

"Yes, of course. Will you arrange for Dr. M'Benga and Nurse Chapel to beam over to the T'Ming and examine the Vulcan crew?"

"Of course."

"I'm on my way down. Mr. Sulu, take the con. Maintain yellow alert," and Kirk was on his way to sickbay. When he arrived, he could see by the expression on McCoy's face that it was bad news. Spock, standing beside him, was his usual impassive self.

"Jim, I've thoroughly examined Spock's ears. There appears to be no physical damage to the mechanism, but I'm afraid that the sonic wave has affected his hearing deep within his brain, where no physician can reach. His Vulcan hearing is much more sensitive than ours, and that's why we were not as seriously affected by the attack. Jim, there's nothing I can do to help him - I'm afraid he's permanently deaf."

While McCoy was speaking, Spock was watching him attentively. The merest flicker of expression flashed in his eyes, but he said nothing.

"Bones! He's the best First Officer a Captain could ever have - he's also my best friend. Do you realise what his permanent deafness means?"

"I know he's the best First Officer in the fleet, and I would hope he considers me his friend too, but that doesn't alter the situation, Jim."

There was a definite sparkle of amusement in Spock's eyes now. He could no longer resist saying, "As before, I thank you, gentlemen, for the compliment. I assuredly do consider both of you to be my friends."

There was a duet of, "Spock! You can hear!"

"Unfortunately not, gentlemen, but by observing the shapes of your oral orifices during speech, I find I am able to deduce the context of your words. Unfortunately, Dr. McCoy, owing to the lazy manner of your vowel presentation, I have some difficulty in following you, but the Captain has excellent locution."

"Bones, I think you've just been insulted! You were so busy worrying about his Vulcan ears, you forgot about his Vulcan eyes! He can lip-read!"

"Indeed I can, Captain," replied Spock as McCoy did a double-take.

"Jim," cut in McCoy, "that doesn't alter the fact that he's deaf. He'll be invalided out of Starfleet and I shall have to be the one who signs the authorisation."

"Spock?" Kirk turned to his First Officer.

"Dr. McCoy is quite correct, Captain," replied Spock, pulling himself up to his full height, hands behind his back. "The good doctor has no alternative. My Starfleet days are over."

There was a complete silence as Kirk looked into Spock's now-expressionless eyes. He did not want to have to say the next line. But he had to, anyway.

"Mr. Spock - owing to the injury you have sustained during duty in the Enterprise, I must now relieve you of further duty."

Very quietly, Spock replied, "Yes, Captain." He turned on his heel, and walked out of sickbay to his cabin.

Dr. M'Benga and Nurse Chapel returned to the Enterprise and reported to McCoy that the sonic disruptor had had the same effect on the freighter's crew as it had had on Spock - all were permanently deaf. McCoy informed Kirk, who arranged for a backup crew from the Enterprise to pilot the T'Ming back to Vulcan. When Kirk informed the bridge crew of Spock's condition, the announcement was met with a stunned silence.

Spock's second in the science department, Lt. Commander Chang, took up Spock's position at the library computer. Kirk turned to him.

"Commander Chang, how far are we from Klingon space?"

Consulting the computer, the Chinese officer replied, "Sir, it is some 100,000 parsecs distant, bearing 237 mark 7."

"Very well, Mr. Sulu, plot a course and head for that area full warp. We must attempt to catch that battlecruiser and disable her."

"Yes, sir." And the Enterprise warped out.

The Enterprise searched the area for a ship's day without success. Reluctantly, Kirk made the order to turn about and return to Starbase 11. Spock kept to his cabin and made preparations to leave the ship. Kirk, with a deep anguish wrenching at him, could only stand by and watch. He visited Spock during his off-duty hours and kept him informed of the ship's activities. Kirk was with Spock when the intercom buzzed.

"Captain Kirk to the bridge."

Spock looked askance as Kirk rose, and Kirk explained, "Bridge call - I'll be back, Spock."

"Yes, Commander Chang?" asked Kirk as the bridge doors swished open.

"Captain, Lt. Uhura has tried to open communications with Starbase 11, but there appears to be jamming on the frequency."

"Jamming? Lt. Uhura?"

"Sir, I opened communications for approach, then lost them."

"Distance from Starbase 11, Mr. Chekov?"

"One thousand parsecs, Captain."

"Mr. Sulu, decrease speed to warp factor one. Go to yellow alert." The alert klaxon resounded throughout the ship. "Scan Starbase for alien ship."

"Nothing visible, sir."

"Hm. Must have their cloaking device operational."

"Sir, I can detect a series of tiny blips circling the planet of Starbase 11."

"Can you be more definite, Commander Chang?"

"They appear to be miniature satellites, sir."

"But apart from the usual defences, there should be no string of satellites around this planet."

"No, sir. Sir, the planet, as you know, is one which supplies dilithium, and there is a large number of Vulcan scientists working at the base."

Suddenly Kirk had a sharp intake of breath. "If these satellites are what I think they are, Commander, if we don't move quickly we are going to have a whole planetful of deaf Vulcans on our hands."

"The satellites are sonic disruptors?"

"I would say that is highly probable. We've got to locate that battlecruiser! Chekov, put the planet up on the viewscreen."

And here, for all to see, against the bright colours of the planet was what appeared to be a black hole.

"There it is!" exclaimed Kirk. "Invisible against the backdrop of space, but visible against the planet!"

"Captain, I'm getting a direct transmission from the Klingon ship."

"Put it on visual, Lt, Uhura."

The dark features of the Klingon commander filled the screen. He spoke.

"I believe I have the... honour... of addressing Captain Kirk of the U.S.S. Enterprise?"

"That is correct. May I know who I am addressing?"

"I am Commander Kalig. We have not met before."

"May I ask why you are encroaching on Federation space in an aggressive manner?" enquired Kirk.

"My High Command has requested me to carry out a little - ah - experiment, Captain. You will discover its relevance in a short time."

On the bridge of the Enterprise, the doors swished open to admit Spock. Kirk glanced at him, then returned his eyes to the viewscreen.

"Commander Kalig, you do realise that you are violating the Organian Peace Treaty by this action?"

"Indeed, Captain, but the means, as you Humans say, justify the ends. Kalig out." And the screen went blank.

Spock, who had been standing watching attentively but out of viewscreen range stepped forward. "Captain."

Kirk swung towards him, a worried look on his face. "Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"I have been monitoring the Klingon transmission from the viewscreen in my cabin. May I offer an opinion and suggestion?"

"By all means, Mr. Spock."

"Sir, if, as seems possible, the orbiting satellites are all armed with sonic disruptors, we are faced with a potentially highly dangerous and aggressive situation. If we are unable to stop Commander Kalig carrying out his so-called 'experiment', and that experiment is successful, it will render deaf every Vulcan - and possibly Andorian - on that planet, and there may well be no stopping the indiscriminate use of the sonic weapon. They could quite easily alter the frequency used and employ it on the Human race." Involuntarily, Kirk shuddered at the prospect of countless billions being made permanently deaf. It would ultimately amount to the entire population of the Federation.

"Quite, Mr. Spock. Your suggestion?"

"It is vital that the disruptor apparatus is permanently disabled and the transmission technique and frequency known in order that it can be counteracted in future. I respectfully submit that I am the logical person to carry out this assignment - my hearing may be permanently damaged, so their apparatus can do me no further harm."

"No, Mr. Spock. Your hearing may be irreparably damaged, but they can also catch and torture you before killing you."

"Sir, my career with Starfleet is over when we return from the engagement. No amount of torture will make me reveal any information I may have. With your permission, sir, there is very little time. Please permit me to carry out my last duty for you - and the fleet."

"What is your plan, Mr. Spock?"

Very suddenly, the image of the Enterprise disappeared from the viewscreen of the Klingon ship. Slightly puzzled, Kalig ordered an open scan of the area. His Lieutenant reported traces of the Enterprise's ion trail heading away and warping out. Kalig assumed that the Enterprise had gone to get help, and turning to his armaments officer, said, "Stand down from red alert. Drop the defence screen to minimal. Prepare to operate the experiment in fifty omas* from now."

No sooner had Kalig spoken the words when the Enterprise warped back into space less than half a parsec from them and, undetected in the surprise appearance, a transporter beam was transmitted to the Klingon ship. Taken unawares, Kalig took a moment to order his screens up and the ship's status

* Omas - a Klingon time period equivalent to just over a minute. Fifty omas would be approximately one hour.

to red alert. In the meantime, a very Klingon-looking Vulcan had materialised in a little-used corridor near the engineering section. Amidst the hubbub of crewmembers running to their battle stations, Spock was totally undetected as he made his way to find what he sought. The Enterprise's Supplies Section had dressed him as a Klingon engineer and made him up to appear totally Klingon. He wore a Klingon helmet to cover his conspicuous ears. He came upon a door with two guards mounted on either side. Strange, in a battlecruiser, for any area to be guarded like this. He had found the area where the sonic weapon was being researched.

He calmly walked up to the guards, and observing their rank, said to the senior, "Lieutenant, I have been sent by Commander Kalig to relieve you of guard duty. You are to report to your normal battle station immediately."

A flicker of suspicion crossed the dark features of the Klingon. "I don't know you. Who are you, soldier?"

"I am Klin, Engineering. I was assigned to this ship at the last base."

"Very well. Is the other guard to stay in position?"

"By Commander Kalig's order, yes," replied Spock, relieved that this explanation had been sufficient. He watched the Lieutenant run off down the corridor, turned as if to salute the other guard but instead administered a nerve pinch. The Klingon crumpled soundlessly and Spock pulled him out of sight. Quickly he turned to the computer-operated panel and ran a decoding device over the circuits. Silently, the door opened and he entered, closing it behind him.

As all the crew were at battlestations, the area of the sonic device was unmanned. Spock set to work.

He had just successfully completed his task and was running a final check on the information he had gained, when the door swished open. Spock's back was towards the door, and he did not hear the Klingon enter, nor did he hear the shouted command. The Lieutenant had become suspicious and returned to check that all was well, and quickly realised that it was not when he found his companion inert in a nearby corridor.

Content that his task was complete, Spock sighed in satisfaction and turned towards the door - to face the Klingon and a disrupter levelled at his head.

Facing the Klingon, Spock could again read his lips: "What is your business here, Engineer?"

Spock chose not to answer.

"Come with me, Engineer."

Spock walked in front of the Lieutenant, who marched him, one hand on Spock's shoulder, the other pointing the disruptor, towards an elevator which took them up to the bridge.

Spock's eyes widened at the scene on the viewscreen - the Enterprise was engaged in phaser fire, and both defence screens were being taxed to the fullest. The Lieutenant pushed Spock in front of the Commander. Spock, his back to the Lieutenant, did not know what he said to Kalig, but Kalig said, "How do you answer these charges, Engineer? Who assigned you to this ship?"

Spock made no reply.

Kalig looked closely into the dark Vulcan eyes, then reached up and tore off Spock's helmet.

"A Vulcan!" Kalig spat the word in disgust. "Take him down to the detention area and execute him immediately!"

As Spock was frogmarched off the bridge, he noticed the Enterprise had stopped firing and appeared to be drifting. *Playing dead*, thought Spock.

On the Enterprise, Kirk was playing a tactical battle that he was not sure he would win. Up to now, the plan Spock had proposed had worked well, but the heavy firing and defence of the ship had taken its toll. The defence shields were weakening with every blow taken and the power drain was increasing. He had got Spock on the ship, and had been able to follow his precise location with the micro-tracer installed in the Vulcan's helmet, and he hoped that the distraction of the battle had been sufficient for Spock to locate the sonic device and plant the bomb to destroy it, and thus render the orbiting satellite chain useless. But now they were going to have to lower the shields to pull Spock back.

Kirk punched the con. "Damage report!"

The reports began to flood in - structural damage to the main body of the ship, but the warp engines were still intact. Time was needed, however, to regenerate the power supplies for the shields, and time was just what Kirk did not have at the moment.

Kirk swung round in his chair. "Commander Chang, how long until detonation of the device?"

"Five ship minutes, sir."

"Captain!" called Uhura. "I've just lost the tracer on Mr. Spock's helmet!"

"What? Scotty!" He punched the engineering comm button. "Get him out of there! That ship's going to blow in less than five minutes!"

"I canna, Captain! Their shields are up and I canna get the beam through!"

Damn! thought Kirk. *I'm not going to lose him now!* "Mr. Chekov! At the next phaser impact from the Klingon, slowly drop your defence shields."

Chekov looked askance at him, but he knew his Captain better than to question an order. "Aye, sir."

A devastating burst of phaser fire hit the Enterprise shields and Chekov carried out the order. "Shields lowered, sir."

"Scotty! Can you trace Spock?"

"Aye, sir, but I don't know if we've got enough power to pull him through their shields."

At that moment, Kirk quite clearly heard Spock's voice in his mind. Jim! Get me out - I'm about to be executed!

Spock had never communicated with him that way before - in fact, Kirk believed Spock to be only a touch telepath - but there was no time for conjecture now. "Scotty! Transport him *now*!"

While being marched down to the Klingon ship's detention area, Spock had summoned every ounce of his mental telepathic control to direct the message to the one man whose mind was closely attuned to his own. The single Lieutenant given the task of executing Spock placed him against a wall, fastening him to it with manacles, and was walking to his position, his back to Spock, when the transporter hum began. The Lieutenant, hearing it, spun, drew and fired as the figure before him dematerialised. Spock felt an impact on his skull, then he knew no more.

Scott, at the transporter controls, his face lined with concern, saw the tall figure of Spock rematerialising on the pad - but there was something wrong; his head was thrown back, and as he fully materialised his hand went to his head; he crumpled where he stood, then fell full length down the steps of the pad.

"Scott to sickbay! Emergency in transporter room!" and he ran to the side of the inert Vulcan. There was a dreadful gash along the side of Spock's head, pouring green blood. Scott put his hand over the wound to try to staunch the flow till McCoy burst in, gave Spock a shot to counteract the effects of shock, and sprayed the wound to stop the bleeding. Spock was then put on a trolley and taken to sickbay.

Kirk had heard Scott's call for medical aid, and called down to the transporter room. "What happened, Mr. Scott?"

"Mr. Spock has a bad head wound, Captain - it must have happened just as I pulled him out."

Kirk knew that McCoy would let him know the Vulcan's condition as soon as possible. Meanwhile, he had other problems on his hands.

"Shields full power, Mr. Chekov. Mr. Chang, detonation time of the device?"

"Thirty seconds, sir."

"Mr. Sulu, pull the ship back half a parsec from our present position."

Chang's voice came across the bridge. "Countdown to detonation... five, four, three, two, one... "

Nothing happened.

Damn! thought Kirk. *Either Spock didn't get it planted, or -*

"Captain! Both our shields and those of the Klingon have gone down!"

"Mr. Chekov?"

"All systems operational, sir. I cannot explain the failure."

There was a shimmer at the side of the command chair.

"Intruder alert!"

But the figure who now stood there was familiar to Kirk. "Ayleborne!"

The Organian bowed formally to Kirk. "We have been monitoring both your, and the Klingons' actions for some time, Captain."

"Then you are aware of the situation, Ayleborne."

"We could not allow the wholesale destruction of all hands on the Klingon ship, Captain. We have deactivated the explosive device your First Officer installed. We have also... disposed of the sonic disruptor system, both on board ship and orbiting the planet. All reference to, and knowledge of, the operation of the device has been erased from the records and from the consciousness of every Klingon who has been concerned with its development. As of this moment, the sonic disruptor never existed, and will never exist again."

"I am grateful for your timely intervention in the situation, Ayleborne. I regret that our technology is not advanced enough to have handled the situation in any other way."

"That is accepted and understood, Captain. You acted in an exemplary fashion. You were able to rescue Commander Spock?"

"Yes, but I am afraid he has been seriously injured. Apart from the permanent deafness he sustained in the initial attack of the sonic disruptor, he has received a bad head injury."

"Take me to him, please."

"Mr. Sulu, the incident is over. Proceed to Starbase 11, impulse power. You have the con." And Kirk led Ayleborne to sickbay.

Dr. M'Benga received his Captain and the distinguished visitor.

"How's Spock, Doctor?"

"Dr. McCoy has just finished attending to him, sir. Mr. Spock took a glancing blow from a disruptor set on 'kill'. He's deeply unconscious, Captain."

The three men entered the ward and Ayleborne stood at the bedside of the still, pale figure of Spock, whose head was heavily bandaged. Kirk felt a swell of emotion within him as he looked at the Vulcan. He had allowed this to happen. Could he ever forgive himself?

Ayleborne bent over Spock, put his hands on either side of Spock's head. Kirk thought he saw a stab of pain cross the familiar features, then Spock's lined face relaxed and a peaceful expression replaced it. Spock's eyes flickered open, looked first at Kirk then at Ayleborne, and recognition registered in his dark eyes.

"Spock?" Kirk's voice was anxious.

A look of unconcealed surprise lit up Spock's features.

Spock! How do you feel?"

"Captain... I feel... tired. But Jim - I can hear you!"

"I have restored Mr. Spock's hearing, Captain Kirk. You will find that the wound on his head has healed too."

McCoy ran a scanner over the injured area. There was no trace of the wound.

"Ayleborne, my deepest gratitude for what you've just done," said Kirk.

"You were not the aggressor in this incident, Captain Kirk. You did your utmost to defend your ship and colleagues, and Commander Spock placed himself at extreme risk to defuse the situation. It is the least the Organians can do to restore Mr. Spock to full health."

"Thank you, Ayleborne. There is something that perhaps I should make you aware of, however. The crew of a Vulcan freighter, the T'Ming, was also made deaf by the disruptor."

"They have also been restored to full hearing, Captain. The Klingon battlecruiser is now returning to its home planet - the crew is suffering from a form of amnesia but, apart from an inability to recall all that has just occurred, they will come to no permanent harm. Peace, Captain." And the image of Ayleborne dissolved beside Kirk.

Spock walked onto the bridge behind the Captain, but paused for a second as he once again heard the familiar sounds of the instruments on the bridge. McCoy was right behind him.

"Glad to be back, Spock?"

"It is... good... to be able to hear again, Doctor." Spock moved to relieve Lt. Commander Chang, who left the bridge. Seated once again at his library computer, Spock set to work.

McCoy, however, could not contain his curiosity any longer. Standing beside Kirk, he called, "Spock!"

Swivelling round, Spock replied, "Yes, Doctor?"

Kirk wondered what was coming next.

"I'm curious to know, Spock, what was the sound you missed most while you'd lost your hearing? Was it the sounds of the bridge?"

Spock paused for a moment, folded his arms in front of him and said, "I don't believe it was, Doctor. It was, in fact, the sound of your southern drawl." And, very slowly, Spock unwound his arms and swivelled his chair back to his panel.

McCoy's blue eyes widened. "I don't know whether or not I've just been insulted by a Vulcan, Jim."

"I know, Bones," smiled Kirk. "I know."



GLADIATOR, LOVE NO GLADIATOR

by

Sheryl Peterson

WHY??? Why did she do it?

The thought clamours over and over in my brain as I swallow hard, trying to still my racing heartbeat, trying to understand what I have just seen take place before my very eyes.

I still can't believe it.

T'Pau just saved your life, Jim... and denied Spock victory!

I tear my paralysed gaze from the two of you and look at those cold, carven features. What did you call her? *All of Vulcan in one package...* I could well believe it, looking into those cold eyes.

Yet just now she cried out - just like any Human woman!

She leaped up and cried out, just as I did a second ago, when Spock was aiming that devil blade for your throat as you lay helpless at his feet. You were my friend, facing death at the hands of another friend... I feared for you... for both of you...

But what did T'Pau fear?

As I look at her now, I blink and tell myself I dreamed it, that it was only one more piece of this nightmare which may yet kill us all before we wake.

She stands there, her face cold. Remote and shuttered as if she had seen a thousand years of marriage and challenge in this place, and this is just one more. Yet... just now...

No. I could sooner believe one of the great standing stones that ring this place of... whatever Spock calls it... could grow a tongue and cry out, before *she* could.

Why should T'Pau stop the fight, when a few seconds more...

He had you cold, Jim!

You on your knees, slashed and bleeding, breathless in this searing Vulcan air that to Spock is home. He stood there, poised to spring at you like a great cat, killing lust in every line of those stone features. Death in his eyes!

Struck dumb with horror, I wanted to leap forward in a vain attempt to get between you. Anything! Knowing in my heart that Spock, with that terrible Vulcan strength made a dozen times worse by this - even for him - alien frenzy that totally possesses him now, would have reached you, and probably broken you in half, before I even got near enough to raise a hand to prevent it.

But I had to try though I knew I would very probably lie dead across your body in the next few seconds after you fell, slashed to pieces by that evil blade that touched my throat so ominously before.

What had T'Pol said about 'only once'? And that was when I only voiced a protest! I can still feel that metal, cold against my flesh. Even in the burning hell of Vulcan's breath, it was cold, and the eyes of T'Pol were no less cold when she denied Spock's plea for her to forbid the challenge...

To forbid the necessity for you to fight each other...

To save you, even though he shamed himself before his own people, begging for the life of a Human, an Outworlder...

She knew neither pity nor mercy then. Even in the face of Spock's apparently incredible feat of breaking free of the blood fever long enough to speak... to beg as I never thought to see him beg in his whole lifetime... she would not be swayed.

Yet now...

Without thinking what I can possibly do...

Without knowing what I am going to do, I step in front of T'Pol suddenly, as if to place one more barrier, be it ever so flimsy, between her and both of you. And, perhaps shocked at my action, shocked at the unexpectedness of my daring to interfere again after having already been warned, for a second her Vulcan mask seems to become transparent...

And for the first time I see the woman behind her, her age a mockery belied by the ferocious willpower of the mouth, the lines of hereditary command etched into the face as if not even Time itself could wipe them away.

But the eyes... they are like Spock's!

Even though the face is masked in steel, yet still they betray (incredibly) the innermost heart, that cannot - that MUST NOT - be revealed. But for one who has spent years searching Vulcan eyes to find the hidden emotion therein, it is there plain to see.

She fears.

Is it for Spock, or even for you, Jim? Does she sense what your death will do to him? To us? Yet Duty binds her round with tradition, which must be followed. The tenderness I thought I sensed in her hands when she first touched Spock's face as he knelt before her in homage (a shieldbearer to his liege?) suddenly takes on a new meaning.

I see you in her place, Jim, standing by your command chair, jerked out of your shell of Command control because someone you love - someone you only think of as your responsibility, even - is threatened, and bound round by duty, you can make no move to save them without breaking the chain of Command and its smothering rules.

Vulcan... Human... They are not so different after all!

As I do with you on the Enterprise, so I must try to do with her. Will she recognise it for what it is? Will she respond? Can she even

allow it, or is Death to be the only permissible end to this ritual... for you, or Spock, or even me?

I don't know. I can't know.

But all this passes through my mind in the fraction of the second it takes for me to face her. If I fail... It does not bear thinking about, but I must try.

My voice is scorn incarnate as I challenge fiercely. "Is this Vulcan chivalry?"

Her eyes widen, startled, perhaps. I press the attack, arguing that the air is too hot and thin for you - that you are not used to it.

Is it hopelessness I read into her next words, or fatalism? How can I tell, as she says, "The air is the air. What can be done?" and not waiting for her to change her mind, and order me silenced - or worse! - I rip open the medical pack and raise the hypo with the dose I made ready for Spock if he should be rendered helpless - unable to hold back the pon farr any longer; the dose which would at least be kinder than letting him become a mindless, frenzied creature, rampaging out of all control!

Will she know it for what it is? Will she read the Human symbols and know what I plan? I can't be sure. But after only a couple of seconds, her gaze drops and without giving anything away at all, she only says softly, "Thee may proceed."

That is all. Is it enough? I can't know.

But at least I have the chance to tip the balance in your favour, Jim, and perhaps save Spock - though I break his heart in the doing. Without another word I turn from T'Pol and walk towards you both. You on your knees, gasping... bleeding. Spock like some machine, turned off in the middle of a movement... poised to spring the instant she speaks again.

Anger tears at me that you should both be reduced to this but I shield my emotions - watching Spock all these years has taught me, after all! - and kneel down before you, Jim, pouring lies into your ears while I pour the other into your flesh through the hypo.

I could whip out my communicator and have us all beamed up, I think desperately.

But that would doom Spock even more surely. His only chance lies here - I cannot rob him of it. Not now!

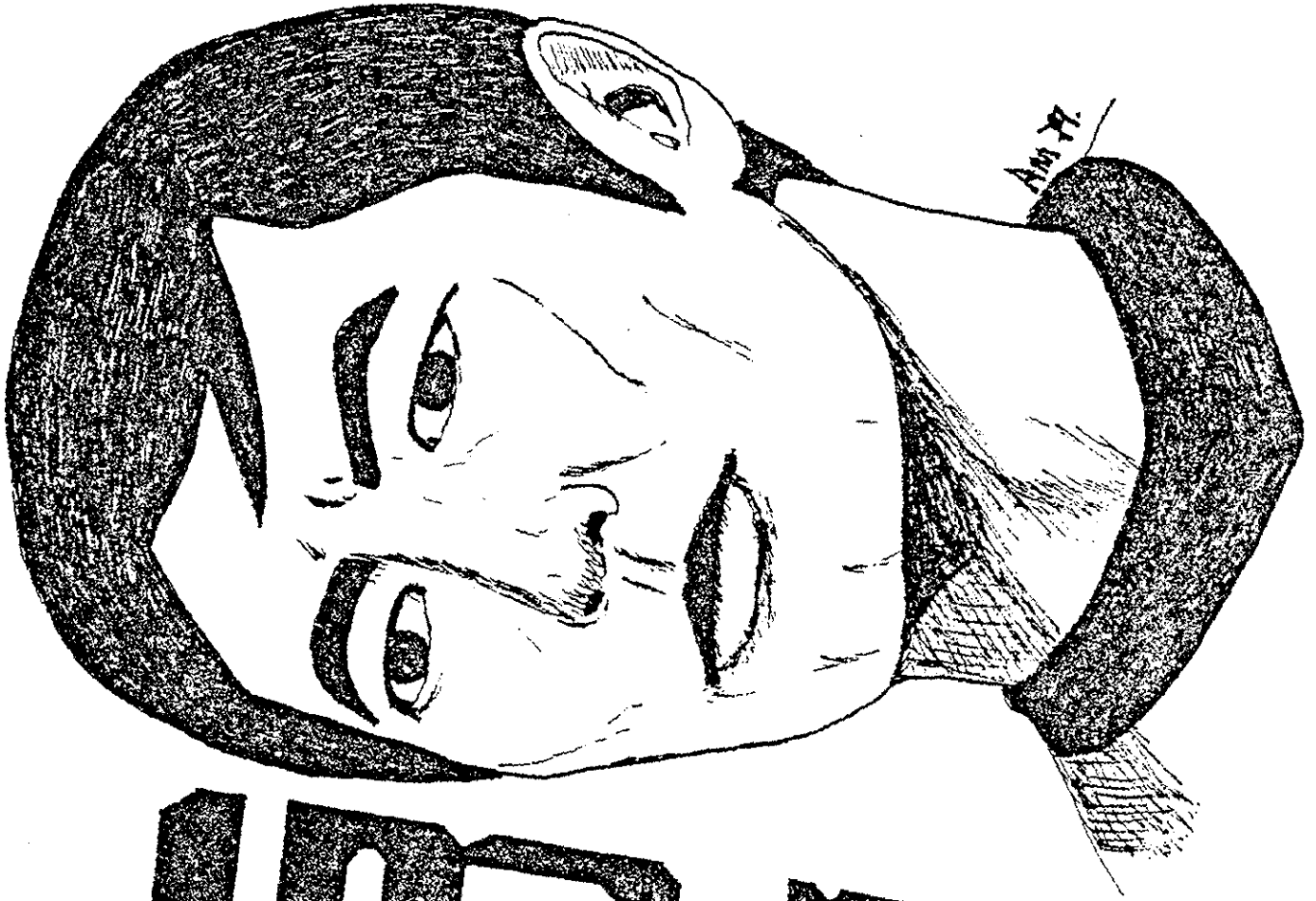
It must be played out... however it ends. You would have it no other way either. Your words say as much.

My heart twists with fear that I may lose you. That I may lose both of you. But what can I say? I can offer no real hope. I can only tell you, "Be careful," and step back out of range.

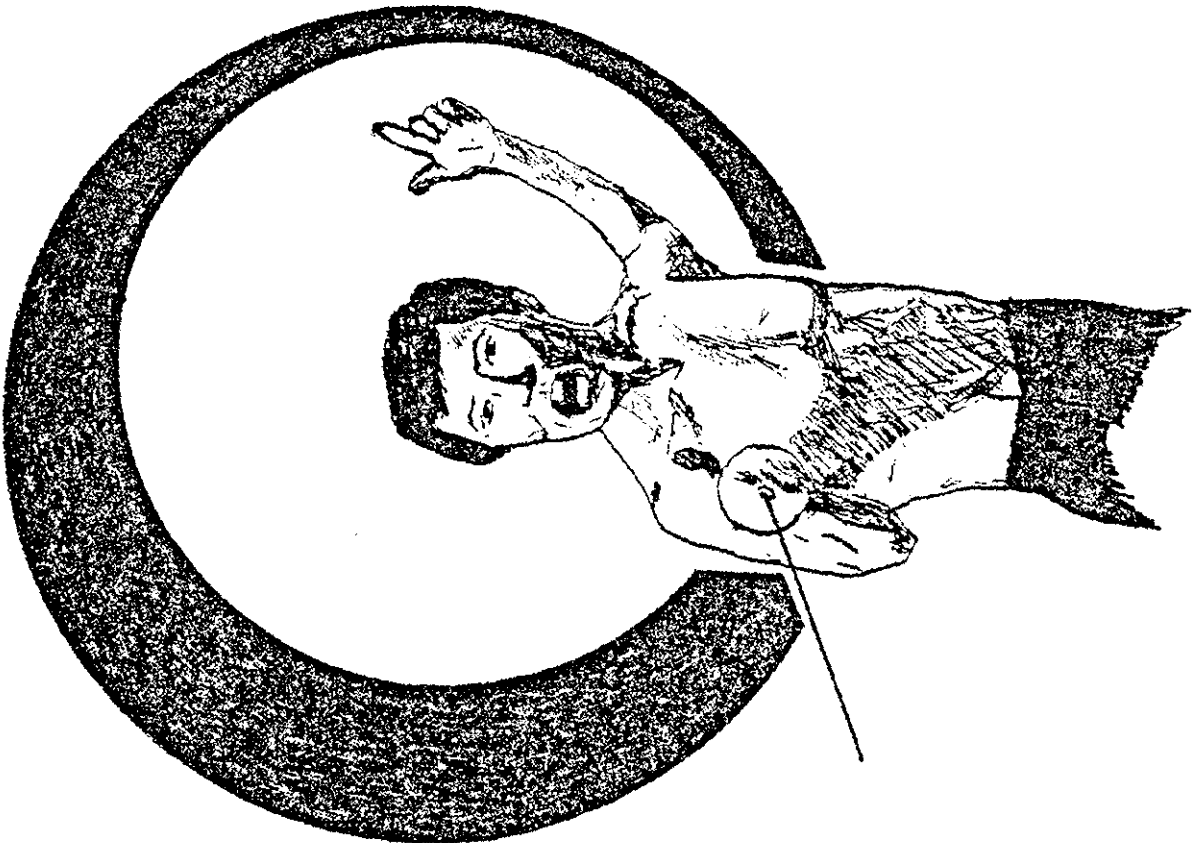
T'Pol's voice rings out again. "The Ahn Woon!" and I wonder what new Vulcan terror those words herald...

And whether you can stay alive long enough to let the hypo take effect, and bring you... death.

'Gladiator, Love no Gladiator' was a motto of gladiators in the bad old days of Rome when fights were staged for the amusement of the citizens; taken from the book SPARTACUS.



W D P



AFTERWARDS

by

BRENDA KELSEY

Here we are again.

Replaying the same scene again.

Same cast: same location.

One figure on the bed,

Me sitting one side of it,

And him sitting on the other -

My fellow vigil-keeper.

Grieving, guilt-ridden,

Trying so hard not to break down and cry.

The one on the bed

Battered, broken by exhaustion.

Features lax -

No hint of the normal strength there now.

Breathing so shallow and harsh,

A gut-wrenching pause between one breath

And the next.

(Please, please let there be a next!)

You stood between us and danger,

Between the ship and its certain destruction,

Knowing what the price might be

And paying it recklessly.

What did you think of

In those last few seconds -

When you realised that we had run out of time;

That the ship and crew would be safe

But you might not be?

Did you think of your home?

Your childhood?

Your parents?

Your favourite flower?

A sunrise or a sunset

On some alien world half the galaxy away?

Or were you thinking of us?

I know what I was thinking.

I was thinking that I'd held out for too long.

I've wasted so much time

Fighting against what was happening to me,

Trying to deny what I had come to feel for both of you.

I'd been hurt before,

So I locked my feelings away

And didn't admit to anyone -

Least of all myself -

That I had come to love you both so very much.

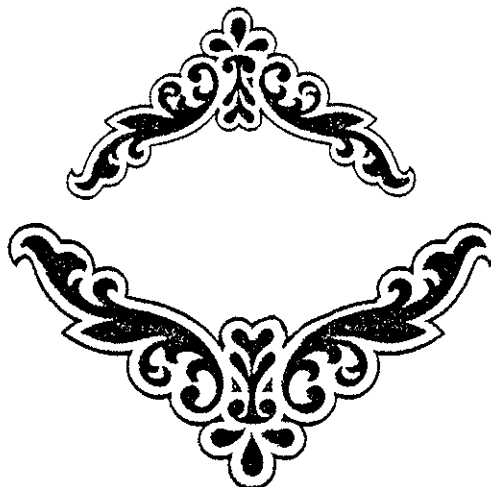
That's why I let you go without saying a word.

What a waste
For all of us.
By staying silent
I might have lost the chance
Of sharing in this love
With him and with you.

I know you both feel love.
What else could have driven you to offer this sacrifice?
What else could have let him let you go?
Some would say Duty -
Your oaths as Starfleet officers.
Instinct.
Habit.
No - it has to be Love.
And that's why I'm here now.
Not Duty
But Necessity -
The Necessity of my love
For him and for you.

Please don't die.
I have so much that I want to tell you.
Wake up.
Let me see those hazel eyes twinkle with joy,
Not flooded by tears of sorrow.
Please, Spock -
Wake up
And let a stubborn old country doctor
Tell you how much he loves you.

Please.....



the lecture

by

LYNN HESTER, CAROLE HUME & GINA PHILLIPS

Scott blinked incredulously at the Captain's suggestion.

Him?

Give the weekly lecture?

"I could maybe gie a talk oan Warp Drive Generators or Time/Space Anomalies," he suggested.

"No, no, Scotty. I want the crew educated, not baffled. Something nice and gentle."

Scott grinned slowly as a wicked idea came into his head. If the Captain wanted him to give a talk, well then, a talk he would give. "Aye, Captain. I could gie a talk oan one o' the most famous Scottish animals o' them all - the glorious Haggi Fictorium Various."

Kirk looked at Scott with a curious expression on his face. "The er... what?"

"Haggis. Surely ye've heard o' the ancient Scottish Sport o' Kings? Haggis Hunting?"

"Well, of course I have," retorted Kirk with more enthusiasm than truth. "It's an ancient Scottish sport. Carry on then, Scotty." He left, looking slightly worried. Haggis hunting. What had he let the crew in for?

The talk had been set for 0900 hours, shipboard time, and by 0845 hours the lecture room was packed to the gunwales. In addition, Uhura had arranged for monitors to be positioned throughout the ship.

Scott strode to the podium with a bundle of computer tapes in his hand, and nodded to Spock who sat between Kirk and McCoy. *He might be a problem.*

"Ladies and gentlemen, today's lecture will be on the Haggi Fictorium Various, or, as it was better known, the bonny Haggis, once a native o' Scotland, but now extinct on the planet Earth." He pressed the first computer tape into the console and an image appeared on the main viewing screen.

"I'll be starting wi' the breeds found in the Southern Uplands. Here we have the Black-faced Haggis. It used the coalfields as a camouflage, but it was very vulnerable oot o' its natural habitat."

The confusion cleared from Kirk's face. He had been wondering why the screen was jet-black, apart from two tiny points of light.

Scott pressed the button again, and this time a pair of long dangly ears filled the screen.

"Here we have the Greater Longeared Jackass Haggis. Although this was a wild breed, some were caught and Haggis fanciers bred the Lesser Longeared Jackass Haggis from them."

He touched the button and this time the screen was filled with fur. "We're now moving into the breeds o' the Central Lowlands. Here we have the Hairi Haggis. The main reason for its decline and fall was that when hunted the poor beastie tended to get caught in bramble bushes. Unable to escape, they were easy prey for the Haggis Hounds."

He pressed the button again, and this time a small brown ball of fluff with short sturdy legs appeared. "Ah, here we have an interesting one; Gerrold's Haggis. It was discovered by Sir David Gerrold. When he emigrated to America, he took half the herd wi' him. There, they mutated, lost their legs and became asexual."

He paused to see if they were all taking this in. The avid looks on their faces assured him that they were.

"Now we come to the Highlands o' Scotland - the last great stronghold o' the Haggis." He pressed the button again, and this time two pictures came up, side by side.

"First we have the Heather Haggis, and again in its white winter coat when it's called the White Heather Haggis. As its name suggests, the beastie lived on heather, which formed its staple diet."

He pressed the button and yet again it obliged with a another slide. At first Kirk assumed that the slide had been loaded lop-sided.

"Here we have the most unusual o' the species; the Corrie-fistit Haggis. Natural selection ensured that this Haggis was ideally suited to its environment of running over steep hillsides in a straight line. As one set of legs, the left or near side, is shorter by up to four inches than the right side ones, this helped them keep level on steep terrain. Because it couldn't turn round, it was easily hunted by waiting for it to reappear round the mountainside. It was made a protected species in the late twentieth century, but it was too late to save the Corrie-fistit."

When the next slide appeared on the screen, Kirk looked puzzled. Surely this was the Heather Haggis which Scott had shown earlier? There was one difference, however. There were three bands of gold fur round its forepaws.

"Well, you'll notice that this breed is a close cousin o' the Heather Haggis. It generally lairs in graveyards, which leads to its name o' the Kirk Haggis. This is the only fighting Haggis. It usually fights to protect its harem, but it would fight under any provocation if challenged."

By this time Kyle was having his doubts about some of the accuracy of Scott's account of the Haggis - but the Chief Engineer was Scottish, so perhaps he was right.

The rest of the audience continued to lap up the Scott monologue. "Here we have the bonniest wee beastie o' the lot; the Burns Haggis. There was a one day huntin' season for them on the 24th o' January so that they could be consumed on Rabbie Burns' Night, hence the name."

The sleek head that peered out of a pool of water looked familiar to Spock, but he couldn't place it. It looked like something he had seen

before - but where?

"But now we come to the Great Chief Haggis; a jewel among Haggi. The King, or Great Chieftain o' the Haggis Race. It was hunted to extinction for its pelt. Finer than mink, waterproof and lasting a lifetime, it was in great demand for hairpieces." On the screen was a magnificent portrait: the Haggis gleamed red/gold in the setting sun, and its proud antlers stood out with a fierceness and majesty which could no longer be seen on Earth.

"In case ye are interested, the painting is called 'The Monarch o' the Glen'.

"Well, that's ma wee talk finished. I'll let ye get back to your duties." He turned and left the podium to a round of applause which he accepted with good grace.

"I thank ye for yer appreciation, but would ask ye to consider one thing; today's date on Earth." With that, he turned and walked away without glancing back.

Kirk turned to Spock. "What did he mean, Spock? Today's date?"

Spock looked at Kirk with comprehension growing on his face. "Captain, I believe that we... I believe the colloquial term is 'have just been had'.

"Today's date on Earth? April the first."



Mission Impossible

by

JANICE PITKETHLEY

It's an impossible task
that I've set for myself.
How do I get this web
to stick to this shelf?
The shuttlecraft was down on Earth
I saw it and climbed inside.
Now I'm on a gigantic ship
with plenty of places to hide.
This deck is often weightless,
gravity it has none.
I've tried and tried to build my web -
how can I get it done?
It's no use, I see that now;
it comes as no surprise.
Calling all fellow spiders -

don't go on board the Enterprise!





MÖBIUS TIME

by

DAVID GOMM

CAPTAIN'S LOG, STARDATE 5970.9

While on a routine mission to test a new sub-warp drive, the Enterprise has been diverted to a remote location twenty light years from the nearest star system. No explanation has been given, but the ship's computer has pointed out that our position lies precisely half way between Starfleet Command and its opposite number in the Romulan Empire.

The inactivity is making the crew restless and on edge.

"Any word from Starfleet yet, Lieutenant?"

After three days of waiting, even Jim Kirk was showing signs of edginess. Uhura ran through the various frequencies with just a hint of exaggeration, as if to show that she really was doing all she could.

"Nothing, sir."

"Is reception any better? No chance we could have missed something?"

"No, sir. Main Starfleet frequency is very bad, but all the backups are clear."

Kirk continued pacing up and down the bridge, one balled fist rubbing unconsciously against his palm.

Nurse Chapel's voice came over the intercom. "Captain Kirk to report to sickbay."

"Can't it wait, Nurse?"

"On the double, Jim," cut in Dr. McCoy. "That's a medical order."

Muttering a word not usually associated with imperturbable Starship Captains, Jim Kirk strode off the bridge and headed for sickbay.

Deputy Science Officer Kinshaw's eyes had a most disconcerting trick of changing from grey to blue and back again. Right now they were very blue, and wide with disbelief.

"And it's never been used? Why ever not?"

Ensign Chekov - who, since the D.S.O.'s arrival a few weeks earlier, was no longer the junior watch-keeping officer - was recounting some of the

ship's recent adventures over a drink in the junior officers' recreation lounge. He lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper.

"Banned," he said. "By intergalactic treaty."

"But it's so unfair! After Mr. Spock went into terrible danger to steal it."

"It was the Keptin who actually stole the device," Chekov corrected her. "But of course, she could have had Mr. Spock executed too, as a spy."

"She?"

"The Romulan Commander. She was entertaining Mr. Spock to dinner in her quarters - privately - while the Keptin disconnected it."

A momentary trace of green flickered in the D.S.O.'s vari-coloured eyes. Chekov pretended not to notice.

"She was a werry beautiful woman," he added wistfully. "But remember what I told you. Not a word to a soul. We're not supposed to talk about it. Officially, the Romulan Cloaking Device never even existed."

He changed the subject. "Did I ever tell you about the time I was shot dead outside the O.K. Corral...?"

"What's all this about, Doctor?" demanded Kirk, the moment the sickbay doors had opened to admit him.

"You're showing signs of too much tension, Jim. This waiting's getting to us all. So I've made up a prescription to combat it."

Kirk groaned at the sight of the tall measuring cylinder in which a pale gold liquid was bubbling ominously. "Not another of your evil brews! What's that one supposed to do? Turn me into Mr. Hyde?"

"On the contrary, Jim." Dr. McCoy filled a medicine glass to the brim. "Back into Dr. Jekyll. I hope."

Jim Kirk's expression hovered between anger and laughter. Laughter won.

"O.K., Doctor, you win." He took the glass, screwed his face into a look of acute distaste, and tossed back threequarters of the dose at a gulp. The look of distaste vanished abruptly. He sniffed at the medicine, took a sip of what remained, and rolled it round his mouth thoughtfully.

"Hm," he said. "Bollinger? No, Cliquot. Forty nine oh three?" He sipped again. "Point seven four one."

McCoy grinned broadly. "Approximately, as Mr. Spock would say. Trodden by Gaston."

"Your friendly computer," murmured Nurse Chapel, who had watched her Chief synthesise the champagne in the ship's medicine cabinet.

Kirk helped himself to another glass. "Misuse of ship's facilities, Bones?"

McCoy poured two more, for himself and Nurse Chapel. "Not at all,

Jim. The programming was done for strictly medical purposes. Curing one broken heart, to be exact. Scotty was still pining over that bottle of hundred-year-old malt he had to sacrifice, so Spock lent me young Kinshaw for a day or so to brew him up another. It seemed a waste for her to do all that work just for whisky, so I had her code in something worthwhile while she was about it." He looked around him, feigning anxiety. "Don't tell Scotty I said that!"

"Not advisable," his Captain agreed. "Cheers!"

The party mood was abruptly shattered by the bridge intercom.

"Yes, Uhura?"

"I've got Starfleet, sir. Strength two, and no visual."

"Jim." Admiral Jackson Riley came over faint but clear. "How are you? And how's that nephew of mine behaving himself?"

"I'm fine, thank you, sir. And Mr. Riley is a young man with great potential."

"Good. Good." The Admiral paused, as if uncertain how to continue. When he did, his voice was grave.

"I'm afraid you're not going to like this, Jim. It is my duty to read to you, without comment, the following movement order for the U.S.S. Enterprise. *The Enterprise will immediately set course for Romulan Command H.Q. En route, she will take on board a Romulan Admiral, to whom ship and crew will be unconditionally surrendered. Precise co-ordinates for the rendezvous will be advised separately, as soon as we have them. Upon arrival, Captain Kirk and First Officer Spock will face charges of piracy in connection with the removal of top secret equipment from a vessel of the Romulan Grand Fleet. In the event of the charges being proved, the Enterprise will be released into the command of Lieutenant Commander Scott. You will now formally acknowledge receipt of these orders.*"

"Orders received and understood, Admiral," said Kirk, with no more emotion than if he had been instructed to stand his crew to attention.

"Very well." The Admiral's tone softened perceptibly. "I'm very sorry, Jim. It's not all blondes and champagne in the Space Service."

The blonde Nurse Chapel flushed guiltily and hid her glass behind her back. Then, realising that without a visual link the Admiral could not possibly see it, she looked at McCoy as if to say *How could he know?*

The frozen look on McCoy's face stopped her in her tracks. Then the implication struck her, too.

"What did he mean?" she whispered. "About Mr. Scott taking command?"

"Just exactly what he said, Nurse. In the Romulan Empire, the penalty for piracy is - death."

"Noooo!" wailed D.S.O. Kinshaw, when the position was explained to her.

"It's monstrous, Jim, and you know it," growled Dr. McCoy.

"Cap'n, they canna do that," gasped Scott.

"It would appear that they have, Mr. Scott." Spock, as impassive as ever.

The D.S.O. turned to him entreatingly. "You can't let him go through with it. You can't!"

"What do you suggest, Miss Kinshaw? Mutiny?"

Kirk decided that it was time to take the situation in hand, before the D.S.O. could so far forget herself as to suggest just that.

"Miss Kinshaw," he said, firmly but not unkindly. "If neither Mr. Spock nor I are worrying, why should you?"

"But... "

"Now, what is your current assignment?"

"Engineering, sir. Re-writing some of the test programmes."

"Very well. Carry on." As the D.S.O. made no move, "That will be all, Miss Kinshaw."

"Aye, aye, sir." The D.S.O. turned on her heel and left the bridge. Someone who knew her very well might have noticed the determined set of her chin - and started to worry.

A full ten hours passed before there was any further word from Starfleet. Even Captain Kirk had been persuaded to take a rest period, but he was back on the bridge by the time Uhura announced, "Starfleet, sir. Strength one."

When switched through to the bridge speakers, the signal was so distorted that it was impossible to tell whether the voice was male or female. It was also inaudible. Uhura nodded to Spock, who flicked a switch, routing the signal through the computer's audio enhancement module. There was no improvement; with so little to go on, the computer was enhancing the interference more than the signal itself.

Uhura ran a practised hand through the backup frequencies.

"Got them, sir," she announced triumphantly. "Backup frequency three, strength three."

Spock switched the enhancer to the new frequency and a clear female voice came over the speakers. "The Enterprise will rendezvous with the Romulan pursuit vessel Justice, Admiral Sumbio commanding, at co-ordinates 532 9509 334 56077. Rendezvous will take place in precisely three hours from... NOW."

"Sir!" Sulu looked up in surprise. "Please ask them to repeat."

"What's the problem, Mr. Sulu?"

"Course for those co-ordinates is way off our present track, sir. No chance of making rendezvous, even at maximum warp."

"Contact broken, sir," warned Uhura.

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Mr. Spock - "

"Recording ready for replay, sir." Spock, as ever, had anticipated his captain's next order. The playback confirmed that there had been no mistake.

"Set course, Mr. Sulu. Warp factor ten."

"Ten, sir?" Incredulously.

"You heard me."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Compute time to rendezvous, Mr. Spock."

Spock did not bother to trouble the computer. "Four hours twelve minutes and forty one seconds, Captain."

"Very well. Warp eleven, Mr. Sulu."

The anguished tones of Lieutenant Commander Scott were on the intercom even before Sulu could touch the controls. "Captain, she'll never stand it! Ye'll burn out the dilithium crystals... If ye don't blow us to kingdom come first!"

"Warp eleven will not be sufficient," interposed Spock. "Time to rendezvous now three hours, twenty nine minutes and - "

"Never mind the seconds, Mr. Spock. Mr. Scott, prepare to activate the Clarke Drive."*

There was a stunned silence as even the voluble Scott was temporarily lost for words. Then -

"Captain, ye canna do that. The Clarke's a sub-warp drive. It's never been tested at warp speed. There's no knowing what would happen."

"Then now's your chance to find out, Mr. Scott."

"Aye, sir, if you say so. But..." Scott's voice trailed off, his tone leaving the added *it's been nice knowing you* implied but not spoken.

"Clarke Drive activated, sir," reported Sulu. "All systems appear stable."

"Time to rendezvous, two hours fifty six minutes and twelve seconds."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock."

"It's a miracle," muttered Scott, sotto voce, over the intercom.

Even as he spoke, every alarm in the ship began blaring discordantly, sending the crew scurrying past the flashing Red Alert signs. Kirk glanced at Uhura, who lifted her hands eloquently; Red Alert had not been sounded from the bridge.

"Then where is it coming from?"

* Clarke Drive: named after the twentieth century sage whose writings contain the earliest surviving postulation that a microscopic black hole might form the basis of a high-speed interplanetary drive.

It was left to the computer's master circuit, which over-rode all others, to reply.

"Red Alert. Unstable situation in matter/antimatter pods one, three and five. Will go critical in twenty seconds."

"Bridge to Engineering?" Enquiringly.

"We heard it, sir. No sign of trouble on our instrumentation."

"Check again, Scotty."

"Aye, sir, I'm doing that now."

"Matter/antimatter pod number one now in critical condition. Ship will destruct in three minutes."

There was nothing else for it. "Close down all warp engines."

The ship shuddered from phaser banks to tail pods at the emergency deceleration to sub-warp speed.

"Matter/antimatter pod number three now in critical condition."

"Computer error, Mr. Spock?"

"Unlikely, Captain. In cases of disagreement between the computer and ship's instrumentation, the computer has been in error in only four point nine three eight percent of cases."

"Matter/antimatter pod number five now in critical condition," the computer went on remorselessly. *"Ship will destruct in two minutes."* Deep in the bowels of Engineering, D.S.O. Kinshaw diffidently whispered something to the Chief Engineer. Expressions of incredulity, outrage, despair and finally resignation chased each other across the Scot's space-beaten face.

"We could jettison the antimatter, sir," he said chokingly.

"Surely that's impossible, Scotty?"

"Normally, yes, sir. But Miss Kinshaw... "

Spock had been way ahead of them. "The Clarke Drive, Captain. As you know, its power source is a microscopic black hole, suspended within a plasma field."

"Matter/antimatter pods two and four now approaching critical... "

"Shut that thing up, Mr. Spock," snapped Kirk. The computer was silenced in mid-sentence, with a squawk of protest, as Spock continued.

"As the Clarke is an experimental unit, safety precautions include provision for ejecting the black hole. If the ejection path could be diverted by... eighteen point seven degrees, it would sweep out most of the antimatter."

"Aye, Mr. Spock, it would that. And take our warp engines along with it. We'd be stranded with just impulse power until they came to tow us home. But - " sorrowfully - "it's our only chance."

"No." Kirk spoke with complete finality. "The rendezvous must be made at any cost. As things stand, we have a five percent chance. Mr.

Sulu, ahead warp factor twelve. Computer, time to destruct?"

"Insufficient data," came the prompt response. "Question not understood."

"This is no time for sulking," muttered Chekov.

"Computers do not sulk, Mr. Chekov," admonished Spock. "However, it is... curious."

"Time to destruct one minute, sir," said Uhura, who had marked the original deadline on her chronometer.

The seconds ticked away. Thirty. Twenty. Ten.

Five. Four. Three. Two. One.

Zero.

At plus ten there was a collective exhalation of breath long held, in all corners of the ship. At plus thirty -

"Your statistics seem to need updating, Mr. Spock."

"So it would appear, Captain. Computer error now five point one three three percent of cases involving conflict with ship's instrumentation."

Kirk almost laughed aloud, but said solemnly. "Thank you, Mr. Spock. Lt. Uhura, cancel red alert."

Only when Uhura made to obey the order was it noticed that the signs were no longer flashing. Red alert had cancelled itself.

"Just one to beam aboard, sir," reported D.S.O. Kinshaw, making an unconvincing attempt to keep the surprise out of her voice. Surely there would at least be an armed escort?

Her surprise was as nothing compared to that awaiting Mr. Spock when the shimmer of the transporter coalesced into form. The Romulan Admiral was an attractive woman even by Earth standards; by Vulcan reckoning, her face was supremely beautiful. It was also very familiar, so much so that even Spock was momentarily taken aback.

"Admiral Sumbio," he said when he had recovered his composure. "Please forgive me for staring. I did not realise... "

"That I was now a Fleet Admiral, rather than a disgraced Commander, drummed out of the service for allowing the Enterprise to steal the Cloaking Device?" Then, as Spock achieved the near-impossible (for a Vulcan) feat of looking acutely embarrassed, "It is I who should apologise, Mr. Spock. I realise that you were only doing your duty. But perhaps later we might resume our interrupted dinner?"

"With the greatest of pleasure, Admiral."

"Ahem!" interrupted Kirk above the faint but perceptible gnashing of the D.S.O.'s teeth. The Admiral held out her hand.

"Captain Kirk, too."

"Welcome aboard, Admiral."

"Thank you." She produced a wafer-thin Romulan computer, no more than five centimetres long. "This contains co-ordinates for our new course. May I?"

"Please do."

Admiral Sumbio interfaced her miniature machine with the ship's main computer via a convenient access point. As she did so, Kirk moved to the intercom.

"Kirk to bridge."

"Sulu here."

"Mr. Sulu, ahead warp factor seven. Computer has the course already plotted. Lt. Uhura."

"Here, Captin."

"Please call an officers' meeting in the briefing room in fifteen minutes. Kirk out." He turned to the Romulan. "Admiral, may I present my Deputy Science Officer, Miss Kinshaw. She will show you to your quarters."

The usual pleasantries were exchanged. The antipathy underlying them was instant and mutual.

"Ladies and gentlemen." Kirk called the meeting to order. "This is Fleet Admiral Sumbio of the Romulan Navy, who is taking overall command of this mission. Please understand that her orders are my orders. She will now explain the true nature of our assignment. Admiral."

"Thank you, Captain." The Admiral moved to the lectern and faced the meeting. "Many of you will have heard that the Cloaking Device which the Enterprise went to such pains to obtain has been banned from use throughout the Galaxy." There was a murmur of rising interest. "What I am about to tell you, the reason behind the ban, is top secret, and will not be divulged outside this room."

"Some time ago, as a result of a transporter malfunction, the Enterprise had an encounter with an alternate universe. Fortunately - or perhaps unfortunately - the Federation's scientists were not clever enough to deduce what we already knew, namely that the universe you encountered was only one of an infinite number of parallel systems. The Romulan Cloak enables its wearer to cross the barrier at will into a continuum so close to our own that for all purposes it was identical. The only problem we encountered was in establishing inter-continuum communication. That took us longer to develop than the Cloak itself. But develop it we have. Which is how we know that all Human life will be doomed to extinction six days from now." The Admiral paused for dramatic effect, then capped her statement. "As witness the loss of the U.S.S. Falcon."

Now her audience was fairly buzzing with interest. The Falcon had gone missing on a test mission which would have fallen to the Enterprise had not the latter been diverted by a medical emergency. She had been presumed lost with all hands.

"The Falcon was in the neutral zone, testing a Federation-built copy of the Cloaking Device, when she came on one of our ships, the Tarsoos,

emerging from Federation territory." The Admiral gave a half smile. "What she was doing there is not... material. In his anxiety to avoid a confrontation, her Commander applied the Cloak too sharply, crossing a random number of time strata. The Falcon's Captain was skilled enough in the use of his own Cloak to follow him - a feat for which he paid dearly. Both vessels were stopped and boarded by alien spacecraft. It appears that in that particular universe, both Romulus and the Federation - even, we believe, the Klingons - have been overrun by a fourth great civilisation. Within minutes, the entire crew of the Falcon was dead."

"The murdering - "

"Not so, Mr. Scott. The aliens proved to be carriers of a virus which is instant death to Humans - at least, to the Humans of this universe. They sheered off as soon as they realised this, but it was too late."

"The Tarsoos radioed details of what had happened, and was ordered to destroy the Falcon to prevent her from accidentally re-entering our universe and bringing the plague with her. Nothing more was heard from either of them."

"It is possible that the Falcon's defence systems were set to automatic," commented Spock. "If the Romulan Commander failed to realise this, and attacked her unshielded, he would have made himself a sitting target."

"Ever since this incident, which occurred some months ago," Admiral Sumbio continued, "the Cloak has been banned and all such devices dismantled. Although Romulans appear to be immune to this virus, we realise the possibility of its mutating into a form deadly to us."

"It was assumed that the matter was ended, until a few days ago we picked up a distress signal put out by the Falcon's computer. In the absence of Human guidance, it has deduced that an emergency exists. Unless it receives instructions to the contrary, it will disengage the Cloaking Device. All attempts to communicate with it have failed. Unless the Enterprise can locate and destroy the Falcon before her Cloak disengages, she will re-enter our time continuum - bringing with her the deadliest virus this universe has ever seen."

"Admiral...?"

"Yes. Mr. Chekov?"

"Why the Enterprise?"

"Because only a Cloaked ship can intercept the Falcon before she makes re-entry."

"But we have no Cloaking Device. Not any more."

"No ship in the galaxy has."

"Then how...?"

Captain Kirk explained. "When we - er - captured - " (avoiding the Admiral's eye) - "the device, we were forced to instal it in the Enterprise in order to make our escape. As a matter of routine, the ship's internal sensors would have scanned it thoroughly - and the information is still stored in the data banks. It is possible - just possible - that with her specialised knowledge Admiral Sumbio can program the computer to duplicate it." He looked around him. "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. If there are no more questions, this briefing is concluded."

Captain Kirk found himself sharing the elevator with D.S.O. Kinshaw. She was looking at him in a most peculiar way.

"Is something troubling you, Miss Kinshaw?"

"You knew all the time - sir," she said accusingly.

"That Spock and I were not about to be executed for piracy? Yes, of course. So did you, if you think about it."

The D.S.O. looked at him blankly.

"You heard the recording of my conversation with Starfleet." She nodded. "When I was at the Academy, Captain Riley, as he was then, was one of the instructors. At that time there was a very vulgar joke going the rounds about a blonde and a bottle of champagne. Its punch line was 'Things are not what they seem.' His reference to blondes and champagne was his way of telling me, if I had not already realised it, that our orders were not as they seemed, and that the matter must therefore be of utmost importance.

"A week or two ago, I happened to overhear you sharing that self-same joke with Yeoman Rand.

"After all," he added, changing tack, "they could hardly broadcast the true reason for our rendezvous with the Romulans. That would be unthinkable. Just as unthinkable as anybody aboard this ship tampering with the computer in order to prevent us from reaching it."

But D.S.O. Kinshaw was no longer looking at him or listening to him. Instead, she was staring straight ahead of her, and blushing to the very roots of her hair.

The dinner was delicious, the green Vulcan wine superb, the blood-red Romulan liqueur magnificent. And very relaxing.

"What are you thinking, Mr. Spock?"

"That it was at this point that our last dinner together came to an untimely end," replied Spock, with more accuracy than tact.

Three days had passed. Three days of intensive and intense work, alone in the computer's central processing unit, before the Admiral was satisfied with her handiwork and was able to announce that the temporary Cloak would be effective.

"And?" she prompted.

"And that I regretted - have never ceased to regret - the interruption."

The Admiral surveyed the scene around her, so reminiscent of that evening in her own cabin many months before, as if to say 'what interruption?' Her glance at her watch could have been interpreted as an unspoken *the night is still young*. She raised her glass one last time. "To you, Mr. Spock."

"To you, Admiral," Spock responded.

"Dila," she whispered. Spock raised an eyebrow. "My name. Dila."

"It is... beautiful. As, indeed, are you."

By way of reply, Dila Sumbio put down her empty glass and held out her arms invitingly. Spock moved slowly towards her.

And the intercom shrilled.

"Mr. Spock to the bridge."

"Sensors report no life forms, Captain." Spock's voice betrayed no hint of the extreme unwelcomeness of his summons to the bridge. "Nor is it composed of matter as we know it. Nor, indeed, of pure energy."

"Conclusions, Mr. Spock?"

"Insufficient evidence upon which to form a conclusion, Captain."

"Speculation, then?"

"Such readings as there are appear to indicate that we are witnessing a powerful field of negative energy."

"Impossible... surely?"

"Improbable, Captain. If my memory serves me correctly, it was an Earth writer who postulated that once you have eliminated the impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable... "

"Must be the truth. All right, Mr. Spock, I take your point."

The object confronting the Enterprise resembled nothing more than a gigantic knot of translucent gossamer, tied in the form of a bow. Completely filling the screen, it must have measured fully a hundred thousand kilometres across. The loose ends of the bow came together in a single arrowhead formation, pointing straight at the Enterprise.

"Evasive action, Mr. Sulu."

"Aye, aye, sir." The Enterprise dipped sharply to starboard, but the bow swivelled neatly on its axis, keeping the arrow aimed unwaveringly at her.

"Lt. Uhura, open a hailing frequency."

Before Uhura could comply, the bow untied itself, assuming the shape of a huge mouth which moved obscenely as it formed the single word, "Enterprise."

"Fascinating!"

"Thank you, Mr. Spock." The voice was soft, metallic and elusively familiar.

"Who... What are you? What do you want?"

"I am Mobius."

"What do you want of us?" Kirk repeated.

"I want nothing, Captain Kirk. I want nothing because I want for nothing. I merely bring you the gift of time - mobius time."

"Please explain yourself."

"Mobius is all-seeing. All wise. And quite infallible."

"And werry modest," muttered Chekov.

"I have computed the infinite strands of time. There are but two which will lead you to your objective, the destruction of the Falcon. Each has its price. My gift to you is the choice of the price you will pay. Each path you see is a mobius strip of time, from which you will emerge unscathed. You must then choose one path. Irrevocably."

The strands of time shifted and the mouth became a bow again. The arrowhead parted, forming two paths, each positioned invitingly for the Enterprise to enter.

Captain Kirk flipped a mental coin. "Take the starboard path, Mr. Sulu. Ahead warp factor one."

"Warp factor one, sir."

The Enterprise edged forward, kissing the first wispy strands of mobius time. The instant contact was made the bow vanished, as if it had never been.

The bridge doors parted, admitting Admiral Sumbio. "I overheard everything, Captain. In... my quarters. I believe that I may have underestimated the Falcon's re-entry point."

"In time or space, Admiral?"

"In both, Mr. Spock. Captain, I would recommend that we activate the Cloaking Device immediately."

"Very well. Mr. Sulu... "

"Activating Cloaking Device... now."

For the second time in her career the Enterprise vanished - literally - into space.

"Captain."

"Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"I have given some thought as to the precise meaning of Mobius' two time paths. It occurs to me that he is making an allegory of the real choice we face."

"Go on."

"The only courses open to us are to board the Falcon and re-set her computer to destruct, or to attempt to destroy her with our own weaponry. Since her defence systems are set for automatic retaliation, the logical course would seem to be the former."

"Agreed. Mr. Chekov, please arrange for full space gear to be prepared. I shall lead the boarding party, with - "

"Captain!" Sulu interrupted excitedly. "Starship dead ahead. Twenty

thousand kilometres and closing fast."

"Identify."

"N.C.C. 1791, sir. U.S.S. Falcon."

"Very good. Mr. Chekov, are those space suits ready yet? Lt. Uhura, please have Miss Kinshaw meet me in the transporter room. Also Computer Operator Sanders and Engineer Rainwater. Mr. Spock, you have the con."

"Illogical, Captain."

"How so?"

"The Falcon's computer must be disengaged from her Cloaking Device. Miss Kinshaw has no experience of the Cloak. I have. Therefore I must go and not she. It follows that as you and I cannot both be spared for a mission which is potentially hazardous, I must lead the party myself. I shall require Sanders and Rainwater, also an experienced security officer. Ensign Potato, I think."

"He's only been aboard six weeks," murmured Sulu to Chekov.

"On this ship, that makes him an experienced security officer," Chekov muttered back. They both laughed until quelled by Kirk's angry glance.

"If you would be so good as to have a shuttlecraft standing by," Spock continued, ignoring both of them, "we will beam aboard it from the Falcon, for decontamination. There must be no risk of bringing the virus aboard the Enterprise on our space suits."

"Very well, Mr. Spock." Kirk gave way gracefully. "You're right - as usual." Then, as Spock turned in the doorway, "Good luck."

Spock raised, not one, but two eyebrows. "Luck, Captain? Luck does not enter into it. Either we shall return... or we shall not."

And with that he was gone.

The Falcon's bridge bore a terrible resemblance to a battlefield. Bodies lay where they had fallen; death had come so swiftly that the ship's medical officer had been overcome in the very act of administering an antitoxin to the Captain. All but three bodies were in an advanced state of decomposition, the exceptions being those of Computer Operator Sanders, Engineer Rainwater and Ensign Potato.

"Spock to Enterprise." His voice, coming from within the confinement of his helmet, had a hollow echo.

"Go ahead, Mr. Spock."

"I regret that our spacesuits are not impervious to the virus."

"The boarding party?"

"All dead."

"But you yourself are not affected?"

"Evidently not, Captain. It would seem logical that since Vulcans and

Romulans are distantly related, and Romulans are immune, then Vulcans should be so also. It remains to be seen which half of my ancestry will ultimately prevail."

"Can you manage on your own?"

"The question is superfluous, Captain, as any reinforcements would unquestioningly be dead before they could be of help. However, I have already cancelled the computer's self-imposed program to re-enter our own time continuum. Therefore, since there can be no question of my returning to the Enterprise, time is no longer of the essence."

"I don't follow you."

"The logic is simple, Jim. If my Human genes predominate, I shall in due course succumb to the virus; if not, I shall be immune to it. And as my companions are all dead, there will be no Humans aboard the shuttlecraft to testify that I am completely free from contamination."

"Don't be a fool, Spock." Dr. McCoy broke in to the transmission. "I shall be aboard the shuttlecraft myself. Did you really think that I would leave proper decontamination procedures to a clown like Potato?"

"Courageous, but foolish, Doctor. However... " Suddenly Spock's voice was reduced to a gasping croak. "I fear that the gesture will be unnecessary. It seems that I am more Human than... I... would... have... "

"Spock! Are you all right? Come in, Spock!"

There was no further word from the Falcon.

On her bridge, working with feverish haste, Spock by-passed the fail-safe circuits, so that the computer would respond to his voice patterns and destroy the ship on his word of command. Then, in a voice free of any trace of sickness, he said,

"Computer."

"Ready," replied the machine.

"Activate destruct program."

"Working." A pause. "Ship will destruct in seven seconds."

On the precise count of seven, as the Falcon disintegrated into a cloud of cosmic dust, the Enterprise, her crew intact again, emerged from the first strip of mobius time.

"Let's hope the second alternative will be more palatable, Mr. Spock."

"I hope so too, Captain. I am, however, disturbed to recollect that Mobius spoke of each course having its price."

There was a minor disturbance outside and Ensign Potato lumbered onto the bridge. He was an amiable-looking young man whose giant physique and indomitable courage were not always matched by his intellect. (It had been rumoured aboard the Enterprise that the Ensign had changed his name to Potato from Murphy because he had objected to the nickname Spud - a rumour hotly denied by his sister, Yeoman Potato.)

"Glad to see you back with us again, Ensign," Kirk greeted him.

"Thank you, sir. Mr. Spock, may I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"Am I alive or dead?"

"That is a very good question, Mr. Potato."

"It was a good question before he ever went near the Falcon," grunted Chekov.

"As of this moment, you are undoubtedly alive. A few minutes ago you were indisputably dead. Since we are about to enter the left-hand mobius strip, perhaps the question would best be asked again in one hour's time... if there is anyone left to ask."

Ensign Potato left the bridge a puzzled man. As he did so, the left-hand strand of Mobius' time bow reached out like a searching tentacle and took the Enterprise in its grasp.

"One more blow like that will finish us. The shields canna take any more."

Kirk was as unruffled as ever. "Status report, Scotty."

"Number three shield's down completely. Two and four badly buckled."

For five hours the Enterprise and the Falcon had been locked in deadly ship-to-ship combat, phaser for phaser, torpedo for torpedo. Badly damaged though she was, it was becoming clear that the Falcon would emerge the victor.

"Phaser banks almost fully depleted, sir."

"Noted, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Scott, how long will it take to restore phasers to full power?"

"At least half an hour, Captain."

"Time to make jury repairs to the shields?"

"I'll do what I can, sir. But I canna regenerate the shields properly and build up phaser power. It's robbing Peter to pay Paul."

"The point is immaterial, Captain." Spock looked up from the main computer console. "Latest prognosis is that the Falcon will de-Cloak in seventeen minutes and twelve seconds."

"Then there's no way we can stop her."

"There is one way, Captain. I have already programmed the computer to ram the Falcon. Awaiting your order."

Faced with such an appalling decision, even Kirk hesitated.

"I do not wish to press you unduly, Captain. But the fastest practice time for abandoning ship stands at sixteen minutes and three point six seconds."

"Very well, Mr. Spock. Initiate ramming sequence. Lt. Uhura, open channels to all decks." Uhura opened some switches and nodded, tears in her eyes. "Bridge to all decks. This is the Captain speaking. Abandon ship. I say again; abandon ship."

From the liferafts and shuttlecraft, all packed to capacity, four hundred and thirty one pairs of eyes watched as the two derelict vessels closed on one another, locked together briefly, then disintegrated in a single blinding flash.

Almost simultaneously, the Enterprise and her crew emerged safely from Mobius' second time path.

"You have reached the point of no return, Captain. Now you must choose your destiny - irrevocably. I shall not speak again."

The obscene mouth assumed a new and final form. Where there had been a bow, twisting and looping back on itself, there were now two straight strands of time, stretching into infinity.

The bridge doors slid open, admitting Admiral Sumbio. "A cruel choice, Captain Kirk. Your ship - or your best friend's life."

If anybody on the bridge detected the underlying note of triumph, they gave no sign. But one person deep in the computer's central processor heard it for what it was.

Kirk did not reply. Spock said, "On the contrary, Admiral, there is no choice at all. With your permission, Captain?" Kirk nodded. "Right hand path, Mr. Sulu. Ahead, warp factor - "

"Wait!"

All heads turned to the doorway.

"Why have you left your post, Miss Kinshaw?"

"It's a trick!" gasped the D.S.O., out of breath following her dash from engineering. "I don't know how she did it, but she - " pointing an accusing finger at the Romulan - " she programmed the computer to project an illusion. She's... "

"Quite correct, Miss Kinshaw." The First Officer was unflurried. "I too had observed that the word 'Mobius' is an anagram of 'Sumbio'. And I have no doubt that the entire manifestation of 'Mobius' was indeed a computer-induced illusion. Nevertheless, I can assure you from personal experience that the detonation of the Falcon was most unpleasantly real. It is my belief that the Cloaking Device as reconstructed by Admiral Sumbio has been modified to permit some form of time loop such as that we have been experiencing."

"Very clever, Mr. Spock. But your cleverness will not help you find a more acceptable way of destroying the Falcon. I have tried many thousands of projections and you have enacted the only two scenarios which will achieve that goal."

"Your assurance is superfluous, Admiral. My own projections concur precisely. There is no viable alternative to my beaming aboard the Falcon and scuttling her."

"But why, Mr. Spock?" his young assistant pleaded. "Surely it's better to sacrifice the ship than lives?" *Especially yours*, she might have added.

"Your concern is gratifying but illogical, Miss Kinshaw. Without the Cloaking Device, the liferafts would be stranded in the alternative continuum. Our chance of escaping death by the virus would be minimal, and of returning to our own universe - zero."

The Enterprise was treated to the unusual sensation of one of her junior officers stamping her foot in vexation. "Well, if that's the best logic can do, then all I can say is b- b- *blow* logic. Sir.

"If there's no logical way, it's high time we looked for an illogical one. There must be one. There *must* be."

Admiral Sumbio looked at her scornfully. "What do you suggest, Miss - er - Kinshaw? That we dig a hole and push the Falcon into it?"

The D.S.O.'s grey eyes turned to blue, as if summer had returned to the bridge of the Enterprise.

"Gosh!" she exclaimed. "What a clever idea, Admiral - er - Sumbio. And to think I nearly missed it!"

"Will it work, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked, when the idea had been explained to him.

"I would estimate a better than even chance, Captain."

"Fifty point zero zero one percent," Chekov muttered to himself.

"Against a certainty using one of Mobius' scenarios."

"Not 'against', Jim. In addition to. In the event of failure, there will still be time for a sabotage party to beam aboard the Falcon."

Relieved, for the moment, of the need to take an awful decision, Jim Kirk grinned broadly. "All right, Miss Kinshaw, we'll dig your hole in space for you. Mr. Sulu - " indicating the screen where Mobius' two streamers still beckoned enticingly - "ignore the Christmas decorations. Ahead warp factor two, straight down the middle. Activate Cloaking Device. Mr. Spock, you have the con. Miss Kinshaw, come with me. Let's see if Mr. Scott can find us a spade."

Scott's initial reaction was not optimistic. "It'll never work."

"Mr. Spock thinks it will."

"But the thing's so minute that it'll go straight through the Falcon without leaving so much as a pinhole."

The D.S.O. could scarcely contain her excitement. "Not," she said, "if we feed it first."

Comprehension dawned. As it did so, Scott began beaming all over his face. "Ye mean the whole thing? Lassie, it'll be a pleasure. I canna

wait to get yon monstrosity oot of my engine room."

"What'll you need, Scotty?"

"Ensign Potato, for a start, Cap'n. He's a guid, braw lad. He can pick the two dozen strongest men aboard. We'll have to manhandle it down to the hangar deck. Oh, and it'll take a right big portable power pack to keep that plasma field going. If it drops below the critical temperature too soon, we're done for."

"Then let's get moving. Scotty, you've got three hours." Then, as the Chief Engineer opened his mouth to protest, "Better make that two and a half."

The next three hours were filled with frantic activity. Every available piece of non-essential equipment was crammed into the liferafts. One by one the laden boats were launched and piloted to a point far out in space, as close to the approaching Falcon as transporter range would permit. There they were abandoned, their pilots beaming back aboard the Enterprise.

At last only one shuttlecraft remained. A great gaping hole had been cut in its side, through which Ensign Potato and his squad, sweating and cursing, struggled to load the huge mass of the Clarke Drive. Aboard the craft a diminutive figure, almost lost inside a bulky spacesuit, was jumping up and down with impatience.

"Best we can do, Miss," reported Potato. The drive was jammed firmly in the hole. "It won't go in any further. But it won't come out again, either. I hope," he added under his breath.

"Very good," said the D.S.O., trying her best to sound like Captain Kirk. "Clear the hangar deck, please - at the double."

The hangar deck was cleared, amid a clatter of large feet. The airlock closed with a whoosh. Sirens blared.

"Open hangar doors."

"Hangar doors open, Miss." Tinnily, over the intercom.

"Shuttlecraft to bridge."

"Spock here."

"Permission to launch shuttlecraft."

"Permission granted. Miss Kinshaw - "

"Yes, Mr. Spock?"

"Good luck."

It would have been nice to respond with a Spock-like 'Luck does not come into it', but the D.S.O. was remembering Scott's strict injunction that after deactivating the power pack she would have only ten seconds to transport clear.

"Thanks," she gulped, and took the shuttlecraft slightly erratically out of the belly of the Enterprise.

"Shuttlecraft in position, Captain." Spock sounded almost anxious.

Kirk grinned. "Not worried about her, are you, Spock?"

An eyebrow lifted. "Of course not, Captain. I trained her myself." Spock paused. "I think, however, that I should man the transporter - personally."

Aboard the shuttlecraft, the D.S.O. methodically powered down all the systems. Then she flipped open her communicator and said, slightly breathlessly, "Shuttlecraft here."

"Uhura here."

"Ready to beam aboard."

"Patching you through to transporter room."

"Spock here, Miss Kinshaw. I am locked on to your communicator and ready to energise on your signal."

This, the D.S.O. thought, would be a heck of a time for a transporter malfunction. She thrust the thought to the back of her mind, took a firm grip on the lever, rammed it resolutely into the OFF position, and said with more urgency than she would have liked, "Energise!"

Ten seconds, she discovered, might be a very short time, but it is also an extremely long time when you spend half of it waiting anxiously to be transported to safety. But all was well. Even at this extreme range the transporter functioned perfectly. No sooner had the welcome sight of Mr. Spock and the transporter room shimmered into being than she rushed to a viewing port, eager to watch the results of her handiwork.

"There is no hurry, Miss Kinshaw. Nothing can happen for a further three point six seconds." But for all his outward calm, Spock had lost no time in joining her at the port.

For what seemed an eternity, nothing happened at all. Then as the plasma field cooled below its critical temperature, the miniature black hole at the heart of the Clarke Drive began to feed, delaying the cooling process momentarily as the sudden compression slowed the fall in temperature.

"Transporter room to bridge. Mr. Sulu, can you give us more magnification on the viewing port?"

The great rectangular bulk of the Clarke Drive, jammed in the side of the doomed shuttlecraft, swam into clear vision. But only for a moment.

Slowly, ponderously, as if it had considered the matter very deeply before deciding to comply with the laws of cosmic physics, it collapsed inwards on itself, leaving a hole like a giant plughole through which the shuttlecraft drained like so much bathwater.

As it gained in strength, the black hole began to exert its influence upon the surrounding ring of small craft. One by one they began to peel out of formation, spiralling towards the centre of the miniature planetary system they had become, the leading edge of each vessel elongating slightly as the burgeoning gravity field distorted it.

"Bridge to Mr. Spock."

"Spock here."

"We have contact with the Falcon, sir. Seventy five thousand kilometres and closing."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. We are returning to the bridge. Spock out."

Anxious faces awaited them.

"It was a good try, Miss Kinshaw." The D.S.O.'s face fell as Kirk continued, "According to the computer, the Falcon will pass within the black hole's influence, but will have sufficient velocity to escape."

Spock crossed to the console.

"Estimate minimum distance between Starship Falcon and the black hole."

"Working." A brief pause. "Minimum distance one thousand one hundred ninety four point four one kilometres, at present speed and growth rate."

"Explain growth rate."

"The black hole's gravitation is increasing at one point five six percent per second. Minimum growth to capture Starship Falcon one point six five percent."

So near and yet so far.

Helplessly, the Enterprise and her officers watched as the Falcon closed on the black hole and its attendant satellites, still doing their macabre dance of death. The separation narrowed to three thousand kilometres. Two thousand. Fifteen hundred. Fourteen hundred, and slowing. Thirteen hundred, and slowing fast. Twelve hundred. Eleven hundred and ninety five. And stopped.

And began to move again.

"Mr. Sulu!" snapped Kirk suddenly. "Prepare to fire phasers."

"Target Falcon, sir?"

"Negative. Pick off the outermost shuttlecraft in the ring. The one nearest the Falcon."

"Phaser banks ready, sir."

"Fire."

The target shuttlecraft disintegrated in a flash of white fire. The energy burst was detected by alert sensors aboard the Falcon and relayed to her computer, which responded by launching a salvo of photon torpedoes. The massive bolts passed harmlessly through the debris of the shuttlecraft only to be devoured hungrily by the waiting black hole. Fed - but not satisfied - the hole made short work of dessert in the form of the spiralling vortex of tiny craft and looked around itself, eager for supper.

And found the Falcon.

Slowly, inexorably, the distance began to close again. The Falcon's shape began to distort grotesquely, the great dish of her superstructure becoming an egg in two and a half dimensions, its sharp end pointing towards destruction.

Then there was only a ghostly cloud of atoms, gas-like yet not

gaseous, rushing headlong into the black hole.

And then there was nothing.

The black hole, still minute but microscopic no longer, was now large enough to be detected by the ship's viewing cameras. As if to bear witness to this, a single star went out.

There was a moment's total silence. Then a wild burst of cheering broke out on the Enterprise, quelled by the anxious, urgent voice of Mr. Scott.

"Captain! My engines canna hold her against this pull. We're next."

"Sensors, Mr. Spock?"

"Mr. Scott is quite correct, Captain. Even at maximum reverse power the Enterprise will impact with the hole in thirteen minutes"

"Lt. Uhura. Call Security, and have them escort Admiral Sumbio to the bridge."

"Aye, aye, Captain."

Dila Sumbio looked pale but composed as Ensign Potato and two of his crewmen escorted her through the doors.

"Apparently 'Mobius' was right after all, Admiral," Kirk greeted her. "Every means of destroying the Falcon exacts a price. We are due to be consumed by the black hole in twelve minutes. Isn't that so, Mr. Spock?"

"Eleven minutes and fifty one seconds to be precise, Captain."

"So, since we have so little time left... "

"You want to know why I created mobius time?"

"In a word, Admiral, yes."

"In a word, then, Captain: Lieutenant."

"I don't follow you."

"I am not an Admiral. Merely the disgraced former Commander of the Romulan Cruiser which lost a Cloaking Device to the Federation. Had I not had powerful friends I might have been executed. As it was, I was demoted to Lieutenant, and dismissed from active service. You are a Starship Commander, Captin Kirk. You should understand the bitterness of losing your command through no real fault of your own and being condemned to be permanently planet-bound. When the news about the Falcon broke I saw my chance of revenge. I stole a pursuit craft and jammed the Federation frequencies. Your true rendezvous was with Space Admiral Gart, thirty parsecs from where we met.

"Once aboard, I computed all the possible scenarios and arrived at the two I showed you. Mobius time was a way of making you suffer, not only both fates, but also the mental agony of having to choose between them. Of course, I knew nothing about your Clarke Drive." She paused, her voice softening as she looked Spock straight in the eyes. "I found myself incredibly relieved when the third alternative was found."

"Revenge is sweet in the planning, but often bitter in execution."

"Something like that, Captain."

"You really expect us to believe that?" D.S.O. Kinshaw, unexpectedly finding herself of equivalent rank to her enemy, was unable to resist the jibe.

"Better than that, I will prove it to you. You will agree that of all on this bridge, I have the least to gain should we escape the black hole. My career is totally destroyed, and this time my friends might be unable to save me from execution, for stealing the pursuit ship and for impersonating an Admiral. I have nothing to live for; nowhere to run. Yet because - in other circumstances - I might have loved Mr. Spock, I will save the Enterprise.

"Captain, I suggest that if you deactivate the Cloaking Device, the black hole will not reach you across the continuum interface."

Kirk's left eyelid fluttered briefly, and so slightly that the movement scarcely deserved to be called a wink. "Now why didn't we think of that, Mr. Spock? Come along, then, Mr. Sulu; you heard the Admiral."

Kirk and Spock alone escorted 'Dila Sumbio' to the transporter room.

"It's not my real name," she said as they entered the last corridor. "Any more than Sumbio. But of course you knew that."

Spock nodded. "Of course."

"As soon as you had spoken the word, I remembered... "

"That you had told me that evening in your quarters. Yes. But even had you not, my command of the Romulan language is sufficient to know that 'Dila' is the feminine equivalent of the Terran 'Nemo' - 'No-one'."

They turned into the transporter room and halted in front of the pads. "Where will you go?" Kirk asked, not without compassion.

"Captain, I honestly... don't know."

Spock uttered the rare and beautiful old Romulan name the Commander had once whispered to him. "There is something I think you should know." He busied himself for a few moments, preparing the transporter for use. "When we were alone together on your ship, and you offered me a command in the Romulan Navy, a part of me - a small part - was tempted."

"Only by the prospect of command, Mr. Spock?"

It was Spock's turn to look the Romulan full in the eyes. "Not only by the prospect of command. As I think you know."

There was an uncomfortable silence, broken by Jim Kirk.

"What Mr. Spock is trying to say," he said, "is that somewhere along the millions of parallel universes is a Spock who might be tempted just a little more strongly, and in which there is no Commander Sumbio until one comes along to fill her shoes." He turned to Spock. "What became of the Cloaking Device the Admiral created for our present mission, Mr. Spock?"

"I really couldn't say, Captain. No doubt the Romulan Admiral had orders to transfer it to her own ship once the mission was complete."

"So she would still have access to all those universes?"

"Indeed she would, Captain."

'Dila Sumbio' turned sharply away to hide the tears in her eyes. She walked to the transporter without a word. Once there, she said quietly, "Energise."

"It is to be hoped that she finds the right universe, Captain," said Spock as the two walked back towards the bridge elevator.

Jim Kirk smiled broadly for the first time in many hours.

"It is," he agreed. "And you know, Mr. Spock, I have a hunch that - she just might."



dream of idie

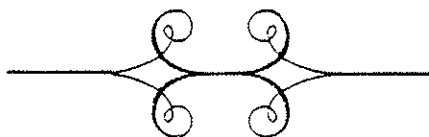
by

KAREN HAYDEN

In the past I had a dream. A
Desire for peace and brotherhood
In the universe, and in my life.
Creation from destruction.

Infinity became, for me, a
Dear confinement within my ship.
I met he who means so much to me. I
Cheated reality and found my dream.

Indeed
Dreams can come true
If you fight and hope hard enough. You
Can make life a wondrous thing - with a dream.



ICE CASTLES

by

SHERYL PETERSON

I never thought I'd see it!

In that split second of time before you look up and discover my eyes upon you, I look at you and see a stranger I have never seen before... and it frightens me!

You sprawl there on the furs, in this cave, out of an ice age on a dying planet, your arm around the woman who nestles against you like a lioness with her chosen mate, her soft copper hair a bright flame against your blue shirt.

Do you breathe in its fragrance? Your head bends over hers as if to nuzzle it while your finger idly traces the line of her bare shoulder, golden against the darker colour of her single garment - probably the skin of a beast she tracked and killed.

As she snared you, Spock?

Why do I feel she threatens us, this woman of the snows, who has survived in such a place where even men such as we might have given up and died, buried under the ever-falling snow?

I can still feel it upon my skin, sinking into my flesh like cold teeth... biting...

It seemed to go on forever, like some evil dream of death, the only reality your arm around my body, Spock, holding me to you almost in desperation as you carried us both towards... what?

I knew only the mists of cold and numbing pain that closed in upon my mind and brought blackness... Then, (impossibly!), there was warmth and the fur that threatened to crush me with its weight, as I woke at your urging from my icy cocoon of oblivion, and, remembering our peril, tried to rise.

And *she* was there with us, smiling down at me like a dream from my youth, her voice like a soft hand, welcoming us to her world, this unbelievable oasis of warmth in that wilderness of cold, white death slaving outside.

Maybe your voice just *sounded* harsher by contrast, Spock - I don't know, but your manner seemed... different, even then, as if you had found yourself in a situation even you couldn't handle! But you were right, I *did* feel too weak to get up. You said you'd find the Captain, so I had to be content to watch you both leave the cave - whatever it was - and sink back into the exquisite pain of returning circulation. You'd find Jim, I told myself. You *always* did!

But on and on through the mists in my mind I heard voices - one of them yours! And driven by some nameless dread I staggered up onto unsteady feet, tottering across to another cave to find you both there still - when you had promised to go after Jim! Then you told me you couldn't.

The woman had said that we must stay here, that there was no way back for any of us. You wanted only to bundle me back under the furs as if to stop my arguments and I was too weak to fight you... then.

But later, when I felt better and had tasted the warm food the woman brought, the unreality of it all had struck me and we argued, you and I - violently. For the first time I can remember, you gripped me by the throat, and the ferocity you had always kept so painstakingly shielded all your life blazed forth in that startling instant till I actually feared you *would* kill me, such was your anger that I should dare to insist that you go after Jim when you had obviously decided not to.

Did Vulcan training hold true, or wasn't I worth the effort of squeezing your hands shut on my throat, Spock? Even now I'm not game to think about it! You merely threw me down like a troublesome child that needed chastising for some crass stupidity, telling me coldly all the while how we, all three of us, you, myself and Jim, must forever remain where we had ended up, that only death awaited our return through the Atavacron.

Then you stalked off to find the woman, leaving me stunned by your so-sudden violence, yet even more surely by her forecast of our fate - of our deaths.

Why can't I believe that? And why do you?

Did you doubt her words for even one moment, Spock? Or is it because it fell from those lips that this unpalatable truth was so quickly taken in without query or qualm from that rapier brain?

Spock - what has *happened* to you???

Have you really changed so much? Or has the cold turned *my* brain and affected *my* judgement? There was a time... once... when to see you as you are now - so obviously happy and contented in the company of a woman, a brave and unquestionably beautiful woman! - would have filled me with more delight that I could say. I know how lonely you have been. Even though Jim and I give what friendship we can, we *know* it is not enough...

But can *she* give you what you need? In a cave in an ice age, with the computers of the Enterprise five thousand years away? And what of Jim? Don't you even care that he is lost too, just as we are? And he is alone, perhaps helpless!

We *must* find him, even if only to be together again as we always have been. But you turned from my suggestions, fobbing off my demands with a finality you would never have shown - once - when Jim's life was in the balance.

Why, Spock?

What has she done to you, this woman who lies beside you now, satisfaction in her every nuance?

Did you... Have you... ?

There is an aura around you that throbs with... possession!

Is that what I feel when I see you there together? There was a time, not so long ago, that you wore that near-aggressive look when you stood behind Jim in his command chair, the hawk to his master's hand, always ready to defend - even to the death!

Could you have forgotten so soon, Spock?

No!

I can't believe it! I won't believe it! And this must be the time of truth.

If I am wrong - if we really cannot go back, and we are exiled here forever - with her - then our friendship might be no more after I speak. And you will hate me, Spock - perhaps even drive me from you, to die alone somewhere, lost in the snows, while you stay here with her, warm in your love nest.

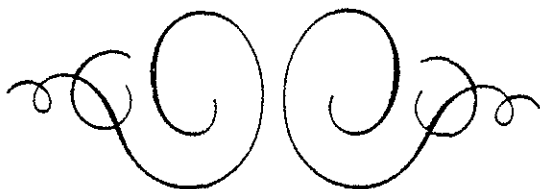
I do not grudge you happiness - but my life, and yours, are back aboard the Enterprise, with Jim! Only when I am sure they are to be denied to us will I admit defeat... even to you, Spock.

Squaring my shoulders, I stalk into your idyll, preparing to drag you away by force if I must, even as I charge you with being dishonest with me... (and yourself!) My tongue no less fierce for having already tasted your anger, and your strength.

You react instantly, and your eyes lock onto me for one bare second with the glare of a wild beast scenting an intruder in its den. Then you turn away, scorning me as being no threat, my accusations of no concern, your attention all for the woman again as your fingers search her flesh... touching... enjoying!

Your face is proud with the fire of the Vulcan warrior of five thousand years ago who has battled for his mate and now rests safely in his own place to enjoy the spoils of the hunt. You have come home indeed, Spock - even I can see that!

But why is it that when the eyes of the woman meet mine for a fleeting second - even in the security of your embrace she looks - for a moment - afraid?



SPOCK

by

SHERYL PETERSON

You are different
Alien to all we know
Yet you touch my soul.



The Shielded Heart

by

SHERYL PETERSON

Behind that brilliant mind
You are uncertain.
I can feel it.
Behind that stoic face
You are a lonely man.
I know.
You turn your back on everyone
Who tries to get
Close to you.
If you realised
You were greatly loved,
Would it really shock you so?
You hold yourself aloof
From every contact
That is offered.
Bones would love to be your friend
But he does not dare
Let you see.
Secretly, behind that gruffness
He cares for you
Very deeply.
You are fond of him as well -
But you hide it
Too carefully!

